

Chapter 2

Topics and Paradigms of Cultural Studies

1 Paradigms of Mass Culture Studies

Mass culture has been the arch-object of Cultural Studies both in the West and China since the day Cultural Studies first emerged. As was iterated above, mass culture studies in contemporary China (mainly in the Chinese mainland) arose between the late 1980s and the early 1990s and came to its heyday in the early 21st century. This chapter focuses on the paradigms of mass culture studies in contemporary China, including the Frankfurt School's critical theory, modernization theory and political economy.¹

1. Critical Theory and China's Mass Culture Studies

The Chinese academic circles almost exclusively followed the Frankfurt School's critical theory of mass culture when they criticized and studied mass culture in the early days of the Chinese mass culture studies and criticism. The School's theory retains its influence in China till this day. The process how the Frankfurt School's theories entered into China and its profound influence on Cultural Studies in contemporary China were well told in this chapter. So we'll not go into details here. The Frankfurt School's critical theory is now in China seen as a paradigm and discussed as an object of reflection, indicating that the Chinese academic circles have to some extent left the theory's influence behind and that the theory is no longer accepted as the only self-evident truth. Thus, this chapter sees the critical theory in the Chinese mass culture studies in a critical and introspective way.

¹As for other paradigms, refer to Tao Dongfeng (ed.), *Popular Culture* (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2012, Chap. 2). For the paradigms discussed in this chapter, see Tao Dongfeng, "Three Paradigms of Mass Culture and Consumerism and Their Resources in the West: On 'the Aestheticization of Everyday Life' and a Reply to Dr. Zhao Yong", *Hebei Academic Journal*, 2004 (5) and "Three Paradigms of Mass Culture and Consumerism and Their Resources in the West: a Reply to Mr. Lu Shuyuan", *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 2004 (5). The author makes supplements to Tao's ideas in this chapter.

In the late 1990s, Chinese scholars began to rethink of and question the Frankfurt School's mass culture theory out of practical and academic reasons. When mass culture was securing a dominant role in everyday life, intellectuals began to get used to it and see it in a different and rational way, despite the shock, anger and doubt they'd previously experienced. In the meantime, Chinese scholars made in-depth investigation into the Frankfurt School's critical theory and got aware of its unique sociocultural context²; thus, they doubted whether the theory truly fit the social realities of China. They rethought of mainly three issues, namely the theory's limits, whether the theory fit mass culture in China and whether the Chinese academic circles had previously misread and simplified the theory. The latter two issues may fall into one in this chapter.

Western scholars engaged in the study of the Frankfurt School found the limits of the School's critical theory quite early. The theory is usually accused of confusing the mass culture of fascist Germany and the commercialized mass culture promoted by Hollywood. China saw in the early 1990s criticisms of elitism and romanticism in the theory.³ Xu Ben, an America-based Chinese scholar published

²The Chinese academic circles used to receive and accept the Frankfurt School and its culture industry criticism as something quite general and abstract, without a critical thinking. Misinterpretation to the theory was inevitable then. Yu Wujin and Chen Xueming co-authored in 1990 a book titled *Schools of Marxist Philosophy in Other Countries*, to "introduce the representative works of those schools in a great detail and illustrate the basic facts and views of those schools in their original faces". The Chinese version of Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research* (Shan Shilian [trans.], Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Publishing House) was published in 1996. Some held, "the study of the Frankfurt School in China never followed a scientific path until the publication of this Chinese version" (Zhao Tao, "A Review on the Recent Study of the Frankfurt School in China", *Gansu Social Sciences*, 2005 [6]), indicating the later-generation scholars' dissatisfaction of the early-day misinterpretation to the Frankfurt School in China. The study of Western Marxism in China grows more specialized and professionalized from 2000 onwards. Ministry of Education elevated "Marxist Studies in Other Countries" to a second-level discipline under "Studies of Marxism" in 2005. Many primary source-based papers, monographs and translated works were published, making deep-going analysis and study of the Frankfurt School and its mass culture theory from diverse angles, and the Frankfurt School received more objective remarks and reflective thoughts. For instance, Zhao Yong tries in his *Integration and Subversion* "to replace the Frankfurt School's mass culture theory into its original context and explain how it was consequently and rationally formed in that context. In this way, the theory remains significant in dialogues with many other mass culture theories nowadays". According to Zhao, China finds a fitting mass culture theory only by comparing various mass culture theories, the Frankfurt School's included, and by applying them into the Chinese context. See Zhao Yong, *Integration and Subversion: the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory of Mass Culture* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005), p. 321.

³Zheng Yiming, in his "An Analysis of the Frankfurt School's 'Culture Industry Theory'" (*Philosophical Researches*, 1994 [7]), confirms the significant role the Frankfurt School plays in helping the Chinese intellectuals understand the Western and Chinese mass cultures, while at the same time, holds that the Frankfurt School scholars basically see mass culture from the opposite of sci-tech civilization and mass culture. They seem to criticize mass culture to guard high-brow culture. But in essence, their criticisms are conservative. High-brow cultures in history are unexceptionally aristocrats', established upon social stagnancy and the deprivation of the masses'

“Aesthetics, Art and Mass Culture: An Aesthetics-oriented Tendency in the Current Criticism of Mass Culture” (*Literary Review*, Issue 5, Beijing). It may be China’s first literary critique that questioned the Frankfurt School’s “culture industry” theory and left a great influence.⁴ The author calls “to go out of Adorno pattern”, as according to him, Adorno’s left-wing mass theory is politically conservative, due to its elitist essence. In this theory, mass culture is seen as the product of culture industry that embodies the ruling ideology, while the masses are nothing more than passive consumers of cultural products and merely the ruled. A criticism of mass culture like this defines the masses as victims who are unable to liberate themselves. Xu Ben points that non-elite criticism of mass culture (such as active audience theory advocated by de Certeau and Fiske) reviews and criticizes elite culture and holds a positive view on the creativity of mass culture and on the masses’ dynamic role. It is of the practical significance to China’s Cultural Studies, encouraging the Chinese academic circles to think about and look for any internal mental power of high-brow and mass culture needed by the current social reforms and to see cultural consumers as participants of social reforms and co-producers of new social values, instead of the idiot masses to be enlightened by few “cultural guardians”. Xu’s article remains the earliest one of the kind that talks about the positive side of mass culture from the angle of the British and American Cultural Studies.

A more practical question remains as whether the Frankfurt School’s theory perfectly fits China’s mass culture, as China’s mass culture seems to be not as entirely negative in the country’s historical and current context as what the Frankfurt School scholars accuse it of. Tao Dongfeng in his article “Critical Theory and Mass Culture Criticism in China” gives a detailed analysis of the basic ideas, historical context and limits of the Frankfurt School’s theory and focuses on the issue of “the applicability of anachronism and critical theory in China”. According to Tao, the object and discourse of the Frankfurt School’s theory doesn’t fit mass culture in China in the early days of the reform and opening-up; instead, it appears to be more applicable to the culture of revolutionary crowds before the reform and opening-up of China, particularly the time of the Cultural Revolution (when the crowds culture was indeed, as the Frankfurt School’s critical theory puts it, highly controlled, unitary and stereotyped. And what’s more important, the social and

(Footnote 3 continued)

right of participation. Chen Zhenming, in his “A Changed Cultural Pattern in the Contemporary Capitalist Society: the Frankfurt School’s Criticism of Mass Culture” (*Philosophical Researches*, 1995 [11]), points that the Frankfurt School’s criticisms of mass culture or culture industry are one-sided and defective. For instance, the Frankfurt School takes no dialectical view of mass culture, ignoring what mass culture has achieved. The Frankfurt School scholars overstress the independence and autonomy of culture and art, and with a misunderstanding of Marx’s political economy, replace the critique of political economy with cultural criticism. Also, the Frankfurt School’s criticisms of mass culture or culture industry are strong of romanticism and a contemporary echo to the modern Western romanticism.

⁴He published around the time another article titled “An Aesthetics-oriented Tendency in the Current Criticism of Mass Culture” (*Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art*, 1995 [5]) that is roughly the same as this one.

cultural systems in China back then were quite similar to those in Nazi Germany). Historically, secularization and mass culture (particularly mass culture in the early days of the reform and opening-up) progress in China side by side with the process of reform and opening-up and are an integral part of the latter, helping eliminate unified ideology and cultural autocracy and boost political pluralism and cultural diversity and democracy. Recreation-oriented mass culture, as the mainstream of a secularized culture, virtually helps diminish politics-oriented culture and the controlling orthodox ideology in the transition period of China. It breaks in reality the domination of unified culture, as voluminous mass-consumed cultural products fill the masses' cultural and reading space, so that old-day unified culture loses much of its market and shares and its influence fades accordingly. Modern media plays a similar role. In the West where enlightenment was already completed, modern media may weaken values of enlightenment, freedom and individuality. However, in a country like China that is still in the process of modern enlightenment, modern media help spread values of modern enlightenment. Tao also discusses in this article about the reasons why the Frankfurt School's idea appears to be agreeable to Chinese intellectuals: For instance, Chinese humanists hold up anti-capitalist values that reject instrumental reason and weigh spiritual integrity over monetary consideration; they blindly uphold radical revolutions in thinking and culture; and the demand of literary and art autonomy in the 1980s in China are superficially similar to Western Marxist aestheticism.⁵

Wu Xuan holds a similar idea that when everyday life is pulled into market-oriented economy, both mass culture and elite culture gets "one-dimensional, commercialized and reproduced", to different extents, though. Thus, any mechanical copy of the Frankfurt School's critical theory results in feeble interpretation and "touches nothing about the substantive issues concerning mass culture in China".⁶ According to Hao Jian, the Frankfurt School's theory indiscriminately transplanted into present-day China finds at least three misplaced things, namely a mass culture pattern misplaced in a different era, a misplaced social structure and a misplaced culture.⁷ In Zhu Xueqin's opinion, the Frankfurt School's theory falls into the trap of cultural determinism and abandons political and economic criticism of the West. Thus, no matter how fierce its "cultural criticism" appears to be, "it never goes beyond theory into the real life". It is "criticism in name only and nothing more than scratches on culture's fat. Or rather, it dances on culture's fat and flirts with capital structure from faraway".⁸ Xu Youyu holds that Western Marxist theorists like Marcuse, Horkheimer and Adorno "never look ahead at the modern

⁵Other articles by Tao Dongfeng on this topic include: Tao Dongfeng, "Critical Theory and Mass Culture in China", Liu Junning (ed.), *Economic Democracy and Economic Freedom*, Beijing: Joint Publishing, 1997; Tao Dongfeng, "Critical Theory and Mass Culture Criticism in China", *Oriental Culture*, 2000 (5); and Tao Dongfeng, "Context-based Critical Theory and Mass Culture Criticism in China", *Social Sciences in China*, 2000 (6).

⁶Wu Xuan, "Mass Culture and Mass Culture Criticism in China", *Shanghai Literature*, 1998 (1).

⁷Hao Jian, "Mass Culture vs. the Frankfurt School", *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*, 2000 (2).

⁸Zhu Xueqin, "Scratches on Culture's Fat", *Dushu (Reading)*, 1997 (11).

society. Instead, they look back into the past and show strong nostalgia and romantic pessimism". Those people "stubbornly weigh spirit over material. They despise the masses and pose as someone who can representative the masses, fully showing their love for aristocracy and elitism". They "never hide their preference for Eurocentrism and a sense of European superiority". Thus, "it must be biased to assess the Western societies and cultures with such a theory and it must be inappropriate to apply it in the Chinese context".⁹ As Fu Yongjun puts it, the Frankfurt School's cultural criticism is something abstract without a real and material base, thus appears to be "critical falsehood".¹⁰ Also, as the Frankfurt School "stands entirely on the opposite to technological civilization and mass culture when it analyzes and evaluates the cultural developments and fruits since the industrialization process", its cultural criticism "is plagued with a stubborn ignorance of diehard elitism" and "preoccupied by conservative thinking and aristocratic arrogance".¹¹

The Frankfurt School's critical theory demonstrates how the traditional humanities think and evaluate, while Tao Dongfeng and his fellow scholars see things from the angle of the modern society. The latter group focuses on the secular side of mass culture as well, but the values are entirely different from the Frankfurt School's. Those Chinese scholars confirm the significance of mass culture to an enhanced political situation, instead of focusing on mass culture's aesthetic values during the transition time when China gets modernized and secularized, socially and culturally (those scholars mostly hold a negative view of mass culture in the aesthetic term). In the debate concerning "humanism" and secularism in the middle 1990s, those who advocated "humanism" and criticized mass culture, basically upheld the Frankfurt School's critical theory of culture. In contrast, "secularism"-advocators (such as Wang Meng, Li Zehou, Zhang Yiwu and Liu Xinwu etc.) hold positive views on secularization, mass culture, human desire and recreation-oriented literature and arts. In their eyes, secularism, market-oriented economy and mass culture are never the opposite of "humanism". Instead, what stands opposite to "humanism" is planned economy and ultra-Left ideology. Like what Li Zehou thinks about mass culture, "mass culture concerns nothing about cultural criticism. Those who go to karaoke never think about what to change. But this attitude will definitely change something. That is... an effective erosion and deconstruction of the orthodox system and centralized theocracy."¹² In general, the positive views on mass culture are basically rooted in the relationship between mass culture and China's historical and current contexts and reform and opening-up and focus on mass culture's significance to China's political scene, rather than mass culture's

⁹Xu Youyu, "Western Marxism in China", *Dushu (Reading)*, 1998 (1).

¹⁰Fu Yongjun et al., *The Meaning of Criticism: A Study of the Critical Theory of Culture and Ideology of Marcuse and Habermas* (Jinan: Shandong University Press, 1997), p. 227.

¹¹Fu Yongjun, *Control and Protest: the Critical Theory of Society and Modern Capitalism* (Tai'an: Taishan Publishing House, 1998), p. 130.

¹²Li Zehou et al., "A Dialog on the Cultural Status Quo and the Moral Reconstruction", *Dongfang (Orient)*, 1994 (5).

textual quality or any transcendent values. This is the key point that differs from the critical theory.

Diversified angles of view in Cultural Studies replaced the previously unified critical theory of culture in the late 1990s, as reflective thoughts on the Frankfurt School's critical theory of culture kept emerging.

2. Modernization Theory and China's Mass Culture Studies

The critical theory demonstrates how traditional humanities think and how Western Marxism evaluates, while modernization theory gets closer to social sciences or social theory and shows the liberal values. The study of China's mass culture from the angle of modernization theory focuses on the secular side of mass culture as well, but its angle of view and values are entirely different from the critical theory. The modernization theory confirms the significance of mass culture to an enhanced political situation during the transition time when China gets modernized and secularized (instead of focusing on mass culture's aesthetic values).¹³

(I) Secularization and Modernization

Modernization is a widely-used yet hard-to-be-defined term. As the process of modernization in societies has shown, modernization is an overall change driven by diverse factors and happens in every corner of a society, including economic and social transition, as well as cultural and psychological evolution. Furthermore, economic growth and social development require more boost and guarantee from cultural changes and psychological adjustments.

Like what Western societies experienced, China gets modernized economically, politically and culturally and witnesses accordingly changes in its social structure

¹³It is noteworthy that modernization theories are connected yet differ in China and in the United States. Works on modernization theory authored by American scholars were introduced to China in a large number in the 1980 s and 90 s, such as Black's *The Dynamics of Modernization* (Chengdu: Sichuan People's Publishing House, 1988, Jin Guantao [ed.], "To the Future" Collection) and *Comparative Modernization* (Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 1996), Eisenstadt's *Modernization, Protest, and Change* (Beijing: Renmin University Press, 1988), Huntington's *Political Order in Changing Societies* (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 1988) and Inkeles's *The Modernization of Man* (Chengdu: Sichuan People's Publishing House, 1985, Jin Guantao [ed.], "To the Future" Collection), and produced an enormous influence. The ideas involved are evidently liberal-leaning. For instance, this group advocates liberal market economy, the universal Western pattern of modernization and a dualist approach of tradition and modernity. The mass culture advocating scholars involved in this chapter are under the influence of the American modernization theory, more or less. But they may not accept those ideas fully and entirely. The situation is too complicated to be generalized. Another thing worthy of attention is about "To the Future" Collection edited by Jin Guantao. The publication of this Collection started in 1984 and completed in 1988. During the five years of its compilation and publication, the Collection was extended to a wide range of social and natural sciences. The translated and original works in the Collection were selected to support China's modernization progress. The Collection has thus produced a profound influence. Originally supposed to be a 100-book Collection, it actually included 74 books by the year of 1988. The works in the Collection were authored/translated by liberal-thinking scholars.

and values. Chinese culture turns modernized and secularized in particular, in the process. A secularized culture goes deeper into the real life; or, social values tend to be secular (in contrast to transcendent religious cultures). The rule of reason replaces theological doctrines, thanks to scientific progresses. Accordingly, people concern more about the real life and are actively engaged in it. Secularization focuses on secular life and sensational enjoyments and confirms the role of the masses in the social life. It pursues a successful and enjoyable life and immediate interests. Secularized cultural values prepare the psychological soil for social developments like market economy, democracy, legal system and community engagement.¹⁴ Mass culture is, as a secular culture, a natural phenomenon in the process of modernization in China and strongly politics-oriented in essence.¹⁵

(II) Modernization Theory and Mass Culture Studies

Modernization theory as a paradigm of mass culture studies originated from the discussion of “humanism” and “moral idealism”. Tao Dongfeng wrote and published many articles¹⁶ on his debates with “humanism”-advocators. During this process, Tao gradually turned to social theory and changed his earlier over passionate ideas of the Frankfurt School’s theories.¹⁷

According to Tao Dongfeng, it is wrong for “humanism”-advocators to fully deny secularization and mass culture from moralistic, aesthetic and religious angles. Instead, we need a historical perspective, placing the current cultural issues into a historical context; that is, Chinese culture experienced a historical transition from something calling for abstinence under the tyranny during the Cultural Revolution to a secular culture after the 10-year havoc. Historically, secularization and mass consumer culture (particularly mass culture in the early days of the reform and opening-up) are an integral part of the process of modernization, helping eliminate cultural autocracy and boost democracy and cultural diversity. It breaks in reality the domination of the unified culture. The bad tastes in mass consumer culture are repudiated, though. However, Tao finds that the negative things arise in mass culture, not due to the lack of “admiration for paradise” or “ultimate concerns” (advocated by “humanists”). Instead, the negative side of mass culture is created in a society without freedom and democracy and resulted from the intervention and

¹⁴Shen Jie, “Mass Culture and Youth Socialization in the Process of Modernization in China”, *Journal of China Youth University for Political Sciences*, 2002 (1).

¹⁵It is also noteworthy that modernization never fully equals to secularization. See Hu Xiaoming and Yuan Jin, “Modernization Means Secularization? Diversified Investigations in a Comprehensive Approach”, *Social Sciences Weekly*, 30 January 2003.

¹⁶Such as “Critical Theory and Mass Culture Criticism in China: On the Issues Concerning the Localized Critical Theory” (*Oriental Culture*, 2000 [5]), “Binary Opposition beyond Historism and Moralism: On a Third Stand to Mass Culture” (*Shanghai Culture*, 1996 [3]), “What Has Humanism Concealed from Us?” (*Twenty First Century*, 1995 [6]) and “Humanism and Secularization” (co-authored with Jin Yuanpu, *Social Science Front*, 1996 [2]) etc.

¹⁷Tao Dongfeng’s first thesis on mass culture is titled “Desire and Degradation: Criticism on Contemporary Mass Culture” and published on *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 1993 (6). The thesis evidently shows the Frankfurt School’s trace.

control from the authority over mass culture. It was clear to the naked eye in the 1990s. As authority-dependent consumerism thrived, mass culture lost the vigor it had in the early days and tended to be conservative day by day. Thus, Tao Dongfeng holds that mass culture and its political role shall be seen in a historical and dynamic way; that is, mass culture shall be investigated in specific historical contexts. Anyhow, Tao always evaluates mass culture and consumerism with some key criteria, namely whether they fight against totalitarianism and promote freedom and democracy.

Other “secularism”-advocators, such as Wang Meng, Li Zehou, Zhang Yiwu and Liu Xinwu, hold positive views on secularization, mass culture, human desire and recreation-oriented literature and arts as well. In their eyes, secularism, market-oriented economy and mass culture are never the opposite of “humanism”. Instead, what stands opposite to “humanism” is planned economy and ultra-Left ideology.¹⁸ Wang Meng published “Away from Sublimity” on *Dushu (Reading)*, 1993 (1), defending Wang Shuo who was much maligned at the time (Wang is thought to be the first icon of mass culture in the Chinese mainland). According to Wang Meng, Wang Shuo with his easy style subverted the so-called rationality and moral obligation and “tore up hypocrites’ masks”.

In a sharp contrast to humanists, secularism-advocators confirm the positive role of secularization in the process of modernization in China. In their eyes, secularism, market-oriented economy and mass culture are never the opposite of humanism. Instead, mass culture virtually helps eliminate ultra-Left ideology. Secularization despises the old political society and autocracy and appreciates human values, paying attention to the existence of man. In present-day China, particularly, the concern about human beings neither lies in the empty words like ultimate concern and religious spirit, nor in the blind admiration for elite literature representing “heavy and painful” experience of survival. Instead, the real concern is to create a better life for the people and pull them out from cultural autocracy, dogmatic ideology and material deprivation. In China, a game-playing attitude toward literature and life as what Wang Shuo takes may be a good way to go.¹⁹

(III) Reflection on and Development of Modernization Theory

In one of his recent articles “Lopsided Secularization and Mass Culture in Contemporary China” (*Literary Review*, 2015 [4]), Tao Dongfeng makes a deeper reflection on secularization and mass culture and creates a new framework of “two secularization approaches” and two types of mass culture. The paradigm of modernization theory thus advances substantially. Inspired by secularization and modernity theories proposed by Arendt and Habermas, Tao defines the two types of

¹⁸See Li Zehou and Wang Shengde, “A Dialog on the Cultural Status Quo and the Moral Reconstruction”, *Dongfang (Orient)*, 1994 (5/6).

¹⁹Either team in the debate actually sees Wang Shuo from one side. The views of both teams may represent what Wang Shuo and his works truly look like. The analysis fits the other mass culture phenomena outside Wang Shuo. Mass culture in the present separates itself from the orthodox ideology and elite culture, thus is like a rapier.

secularization and mass culture in contemporary China. According to Tao, China witnessed in the 1980s the first process of secularization, socially and culturally, which was officially called as something “to do away with fetishes and superstitions and emancipate the mind”. The Chinese society got liberated from the quasi-religious totalitarianism controlling the country in the Cultural Revolution (the process in this sense was like exorcism in the West, but different somehow). This process turned its back on asceticism, personal cult and highly-political private life in the Cultural Revolution and reestablished the legitimacy of the material life, so as to rebuild rational individuals aware of individual rights and public concerns and reconstruct a civil society agreeable for individual and public interests. That was a positive process of secularization. Accordingly, mass culture at that time showed great interest in individuality, material life and self-experience, but was never indifferent to political participation or reduced to depoliticized consumerist materialism. Instead, it played an active role in reconstructing the new public life in China. With Teresa Teng’s popular songs as an example, Tao points out that mass culture, as the key cultural form in the first process of secularization in contemporary China, took an active part in the 1980s in constructing the new public life in the country, echoing with and promoting in its own way the enlightenment and humanitarian thoughts in intelligentsia in China. But from the early 1990s onwards, particularly the middle and late 1990s, the process of secularization in China began to get lopsided and the public interest tended to lose its ground. A new type of secularization turned up, featuring the abnormal indulgence in material and egoist comforts. People fall into a crazy pursuit of luxuries, material comforts and physical pleasure, while the public interest declines. The society remains cold and detached to public issues and shows no interest in political issues. Interpersonal contacts keep withering. Mass culture tries to sustain and move forward in such a context from the 1990s onwards. The public sphere is thus denied and betrayed in a way different from religion. People go back to physiological/physical pleasures and closed inner world, which results in a morbid narcissistic personality. Tao Dongfeng holds that the two forms of secularization discussed in the article serve as the basis for the analysis of the two types of mass culture.

Tao points out that neither the Western God nor the Cultural Revolution helps eliminate degenerative consumerism and materialism apathetic to political issues from the 1990s onwards. The only way is to reinvigorate the public spirit and to rebuild a civil society. Participation channels must keep smooth in the public sphere. The institutional obstacles to the public communication lead to nothing else except forcing people to materialism.

3. New Left Paradigm and China’s Mass Culture Studies

The New Left paradigm and the moralism- and aestheticism-based Frankfurt School paradigm both hold a radical critical attitude toward mass culture, while the former focuses more on political-economic and struggle analyses, rather than abstract moral and aesthetic criticisms. The New Left theorists see themselves as the spokesmen on behalf of the vulnerable on the bottom of the society (in contrast, the moralism- and aestheticism-based paradigm poses as the capitalized abstract “Man”).

The New Left paradigm of mass culture studies made its debut in China on *Dushu (Reading)*, 1997 (2). The feature articles published on this issue under the title of “the masses, culture and mass culture” set the basic tune of the New Left theory of mass culture: Mass culture is exclusively for the middle class (white-collars)/privileged class. It is not something truly for the masses. Han Shaogong points in his “Who Are ‘the Masses’” that “the masses” was previously the synonym of “poverty” and poor life. As the pattern of wealth and profit distribution is radically reconstructed in a modern and industrial consumer society, the poor becomes the minority, while the bourgeois class expands. Thus, a new affluent “majority” emerges with purchasing power. According to Han, mass culture is no longer something for the previously poor “masses”. Instead, it serves the middle-class “minority” in the old sense.

Kuang Xinnian clearly states in his “‘The Masses’ as a Cultural Imagination” that the meaning of “the masses” has changed with the concept of mass culture. The historical term “the masses” now refers to white-collars. In the global integration, power, elites and mass culture are on intimate terms with each other as never before. Kuang published another relevant article “Cultural Studies as a ‘Sun-top’” on *Frontiers*, 2003 (1), turning his fire from mass culture to Cultural Studies (mass culture included). According to Kuang, Cultural Studies and capitalism/middle class pose as nothing more than a “mistress” or “concubine” to its “husband”/patron. Cultural Studies never intends to criticize the wicked deeds of its “husband” (capitalism); instead, it only takes the latter as “something to flirt with”. Kuang holds that Cultural Studies deeply roots itself in the middle class and serves as the night watchman for the latter’s perceptual lebensraum. The author redirects his criticisms of “the class origin” of Cultural Studies to academic identity and academic politics. Cultural Studies plagued with academic politics remove all dynamites to the political and economic structures of capitalism and remain incapable of trench warfare to seize the cultural front from capitalism. Thus, Cultural Studies does nothing except “to attack the capitalist class as a part of the latter”, so that the class struggle grows harmless day by day. In a word, Cultural Studies has turned from a life-and-death political struggle between the proletariat and the capitalist class to a rubber-bullet fight of words and culture. It is more of dazzling fireworks in a postmodern society and era of consumerism than a gunfire-filled war.

Dai Jinhua is another prominent figure of the New Left paradigm. In her “The Invisible Politics in Mass Culture” published on *Frontiers*, 1999 (2), Dai makes a smart analysis of the changing meaning of the word “plaza” (*guangchang* in Chinese) and has a sharp eye on the conspiracy of business and politics in present-day Chinese society. The Chinese translation of “plaza” indicates a diversion, rewriting, arrogation and even violation of the word “revolution” in the context of thriving consumerism and market capitalism. Previously in the Chinese context, *guangchang* (“plaza”) was always a political term and linked with “revolution” and stood dominantly in the ideological discourse. An era dominated by revolution is replaced by a one of consumption. What’s more than this, revolution and consumption rely on each other and are in conflict in a new historical period. So is the situation for politics and market. The author gives other examples in

advertisements and other commercial behaviors of the diversion of the previous terms for revolution, illustrating the reciprocal, mutually replaceable and linkable relationship between revolution and business and describing the relationship between mass culture/consumerism and the interest of the middle class/New Rich in contemporary China. Dai holds that mass culture and mass media in its heyday in the 1990s both served the tastes and consumption needs of the so-called middle class. As the New Left's core idea goes, mass culture is equal to bourgeois culture and mass culture in China is a practice of cultural hegemony that pushes the middle class's interest to a legitimate position. As a New Left critic, Dai Jinhua not only criticizes mass culture in her article, but also questions passive liberalism. Or, she sees mass culture and passive liberalism as conspirators, co-denying class conflicts and economic inequality and co-legitimizing the New Rich. In actuality, the New Left scholars' true focus rests not on mass culture studies, but on questioning and criticizing liberalism. In their eyes, liberalists are the spokesmen of consumerism.

The New Left paradigm of mass culture studies has an acute idea of the latest development trends in mass culture, while there are numerous problems. It sees mass culture in an oversimplified manner, equating all types of mass culture with the bourgeois mentality. Thus, it ignores the complexity of mass culture and various political and cultural roles mass culture has played in different periods. Also, the New Left paradigm features a simplified analysis of classes. Consumption culture in China is neither necessarily positive nor naturally conservative. Instead, its political role depends upon the specific historical context it sits in. Abstract market, commodity or aesthetic criticism solves no problems specific to China. Moreover, New Left critics usually see "farewell to revolution", passive liberalism, mass consumption culture and mainstream culture in the same perspective, simply ignoring the differences between them. For instance, many intellectuals who advocate mass culture and liberalism evidently hold views different from the mainstream culture when they call for freedom, democracy and political reform. Lastly and most importantly, the New Left criticism of mass culture is set on a more radical theory: China is now a capitalist society of the global market economy and consumption; therefore, mass culture in present-day China is exactly the capitalist consumption culture. However, this basic judgment is over-simplified. As many scholars state, China is now more of crony capitalism than capitalism. The ongoing market reform in China is controlled by power, without matching institutional reform and rule of law. The New Left criticism of mass culture based on a feeble judgment naturally falls wrong theoretically and empirically.

4. Emergence of Empirical and Ethnographic Studies

It is noted that the aforementioned paradigms, be it the Frankfurt School's critical theory, modernization theory or the New Left paradigm, or be it negative or positive about mass culture, are all clear and firm about their own values and political demands. However, none gives positive supporting evidence convincing enough, despite the seemingly-eloquent analysis. They simply appear to be too vague and general sometimes. In recent years, field study and ethnographic method grow stronger in case and empirical studies of mass culture phenomena. Ethnographic

methodology is applied, in varying degrees, in the articles concerned that hold more complicated attitudes toward mass culture in a more dialectical manner.

Cheng Wenchao gives an apt and in-depth analysis of the power relations between sneakers, PLA uniform shoes and commonly-called gym shoes in his “Sneakers and the Power Relations Hidden in Popular Culture”. He first recounts the superior status PLA uniform shoes implied over common gym shoes in the early days of the People’s Republic of China when only the privileged groups had access to and wore PLA uniform shoes. Sneakers later rivaled PLA uniform shoes, indicating the decline of the superior status previously enjoyed by PLA uniform shoes-wearers: Anyone could wear anything he could afford. New social ranks grew, known as economic ranks, as sneakers were at the time not affordable for all. They were something for the economically-privileged: Only those who could afford sneakers could enjoy sneakers; otherwise, one was only an on-looker. Cheng thus points out that.

We find two power relations in the fashion history of gym shoes that evolves from PLA uniform shoes to sneakers. Power changed hands from the politically privileged to the economically privileged. We see in both trends social ranks, privileges and corresponding ideas. We may draw the same conclusion in wider ranges extending from shoes to all garments.²⁰

Cheng Wenchao evidently makes his analysis from a historical and developmental angle, stressing the historical path of the current popular culture, as well as the power relations ever emerging in the history of mass culture. According to Cheng, anyone who only sees one of the two power relations lacks a historical attitude and ignores historical facts and the reality. The over-simplified criticisms of China’s popular culture ignoring the political privilege in the ultra-Left period fall as a hollow theory. It is equally precarious to be indiscriminately positive about China’s popular culture, focusing only on its rebellion against the old-day political privilege and paying no attention to the new economic privilege growing out of it. The author further states that the two power relations co-exist in present-day China and are joining hands. That’s what we call a power-for-money deal that plunges the society into an abyss. Cheng Wenchao actually gives an objective analysis of the power relations involved in the fashion of sneakers in China from a historical and sociological view. Scholars may adopt similar methods in the analysis of mass culture.

Xu Xu, who authors “A Carnival of Bodies in an Autumn Rain: How to Decode the Live Show of the Second Golden Eagle Awards Festival”, analyzes that live show from the cultural perspective with Hall’s encoding/decoding model and Barthes’s semiotics. Xu categorizes the participants of the Festival into five groups, namely China Television Artists Association (CTAA) as the official participant representing the national ideology; Hunan television circles and local government

²⁰Cheng Wenchao, “Sneakers and the Power Relations Hidden in Popular Culture” in Tao Dongfeng et al. (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (Vol. III) (Tianjin: Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2002), p. 242.

as the key or direct booster of the event; showbiz stars as the basic encoding material of the event, who took an active role, despite being dominated; business-owner sponsors, who remained clear-headed and straightforward about their interests through the whole thing; and the live audience as nothing more than the background of the live show. It was these people and institutions that co-created a television text and cultural product as a hopeful classic of the Chinese mass culture. According to the author, the CTAA and the event sponsors put forth demands poles apart, so that Golden Eagle Broadcasting System (GBS) in charge of the encoding work fell into conflicts and contradictions when it tried to meet both parties' needs, because the guidelines of Golden Eagle Awards organizer went contradicted against marketing strategies of the business-owner sponsors (i.e. entertaining and audience rating). Nonetheless, Hunan television circles smartly managed to make a reconciliation of all the conflicts and contradictions.²¹ Xu sees into how the participants dealt with the conflicts and contradictions and came to terms with each other and concludes that mass culture producers, during the encoding process, selected impressive symbols and signs and smartly filled them into the narrative syntagms, so that the live show created some space for significance proliferation and reproduction. In this way, audience finds the pleasure of text reading in a TV-based popular reader. The physical pleasure the carnival-like Festival brought to people remained as its core. By way of significance encoding, it launched clever attacks by dodging, diminishing, attacking and transforming the significance of the mainstream and elite culture. Nevertheless, the Festival entertained the audience without going to the extremes. That may be the difference between mass culture in the Chinese mainland and that in Hong Kong and Taiwan.²²

In addition, the authors of *Bars in Shanghai* choose two groups of objects of observation in their study, namely bars in the bar street on Hengshan Road and bars in proximity to Fudan and Tongji, and try to analyze the urban consumption culture unique to Shanghai at the turning of centuries, tracing the cultural past of consumerism in Shanghai by seeing into actual consumption space and literary texts, and to comb the changes in Shanghai's urban space in a modern and globalized context, interpreting the complicated social and cultural realities in contemporary Shanghai from the angle of consumption.

Following an ethnographic methodology, the authors by way of field study and interviews interpret bars in Shanghai concerning space production, cultural icon, body and gender, political nostalgia, sex and leisure and draw a number of inspirational conclusions. According to the authors, bars on Hengshan Road are evidently in a space of consumerism, in which consumer choice plays a critical role.

²¹Xu Xu, "A Carnival of Bodies in an Autumn Rain: How to Decode the Live Show of the Second Golden Eagle Awards Festival" in Tao Dongfeng et al. (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (Vol. III) (Tianjin: Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2002), p. 260.

²²Xu Xu, "A Carnival of Bodies in an Autumn Rain: How to Decode the Live Show of the Second Golden Eagle Awards Festival" in Tao Dongfeng et al. (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (Vol. III) (Tianjin: Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2002), p. 271.

But consumerism refers not only to consumer behaviors. It mainly means the production, distribution, desire, access and use of icon-things in a bar, during which process consumerism and politics tie into an in dissoluble bound. A consumption space turns into a political thing and the personal experience in the space, such as the recognition of consumer behaviors, develops into a sort of political power. For example, the authors find that the exotic touch actually ties up multiple relations in a bar: “Ideology and commercial consumption, the state power and commercial capital, and globalization and the national consciousness, entangle here (in the exotic atmosphere in a bar) into a whirling scene of mixed tints.”²³

According to the authors, the political nostalgia in bars in Shanghai, be it expressed in the intellectual discourse or elite narrative, is likely to fall into the strange loop of political nostalgia of Old Shanghai. This nostalgia does open the horizon to resist capital, consumerism, globalization and state power and rebuild local knowledge. In the meantime, nostalgia itself is, however, the reminiscence of consumerism and cosmopolitanism. The political nostalgia for Old Shanghai needs to make a response, as the other, to the cultural reality in contemporary Shanghai.²⁴

The authors illustrate the complicated cultural phenomena in bars in Shanghai by field study and find an access to understanding mass culture.

Yang Ling’s doctoral dissertation “Fans of Super Voice Girls and the Contemporary Consumption of Mass Culture”²⁵ is a typical try to study mass culture in contemporary China with ethnographic methods in a conscious and methodological way, focusing on how the fans of Super Voice Girls show their understanding of the contemporary Chinese society, construct meaning and recognition and build their community culture, by appreciating and supporting their idols. As a scholar-fan of Super Voice Girls, the author tries to redress the prevailing bias in Cultural Studies in contemporary China with an ethnographic methodology and her own experience. It is a good way to rectify the overstress on theoretical deduction and ideological criticism over the empirical investigation into cultural phenomena. The author holds that in the specific cultural practice of the fans of Super Voice Girls we see how complicated and multifaceted consumer activities are in a modern society. Consumption marks social differentiation and serves as a leverage of social control. In the meantime, it opens up a cultural space shared by different social classes to show their recognition and fuel changes. Cultural consumption/consumption culture is never merely secular, hedonistic or shallow, with which people leave in-depth thinking or emotions untouched in the pleasure of shopping. Dr. Yang’s dissertation reveals the complexity of mass culture and refutes any oversimplified attitude toward or value of mass culture.

²³Bao Yaming et al., *Bars in Shanghai: Space, Consumption and Imagination* (Nanjing: Jiangsu People’s Publishing House, 2001), p. 115.

²⁴Bao Yaming et al., *Bars in Shanghai: Space, Consumption and Imagination* (Nanjing: Jiangsu People’s Publishing House, 2001), p. 153.

²⁵Yang Ling(Capital Normal University), *Carnivals of Recreation in an Era of Transition: Fans of Super Voice Girls and the Consumption of Mass Culture* based on her doctoral dissertation, Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2009 and 2012.

A study of mass culture with empirical and ethnographic methodologies helps fully understand the complex richness of China's mass culture and avoid simplified, superficial and stereotyped judgements. It is a reasonable logic for the study of mass culture. No studies without their own attitudes or values have ever existed. So do empirical and ethnographic studies, despite their superiorities. Instead, values are formed in the process of in-depth and careful investigation into a specific object of empirical studies. Any prejudgement will impede the full understanding of the object, leaving the study and its outcomes less objective and scientific.

2 Ethnicity and Identity

Modern history of China, its intellectual history included, has evolved around the building of a nation-state. However, the nation-state issue was overshadowed and even replaced by the class struggle between the 1950s and 1970s and remained under-studied academically. The Chinese academic circles saw a boom of discussion of the national and cultural identity of the Chinese nation in the early 1990s. The boom swept across the field of Cultural Studies in China as well. It has substantially reshaped the discourse atmosphere and pattern in the Chinese academic circles and its influence has continued into this day.

1. Emergence of the National Identity Issue

In Cultural Studies, the national identity issue is generally included in "post-colonial theory"/"post-colonial criticism" or "the Third World criticism". Post-colonial theory and the theory of the clash of civilizations in the West evidently brought out the national identity issue in the Chinese mainland. The issue was first raised in Cultural Studies field in China when Said's *Orientalism* was introduced and discussed. *Dushu (Reading)* magazine published in Issue 9, 1993 a succession of articles introducing Edward Said and his "Orientalism" and set off the discussion of the national and cultural identity in China. Also, some attributed the emergence of the national and cultural identity issue in China to Huntington's "clash of civilizations". Related articles were published in installments in *Cankao Xiaoxi* (20–26 August 1993), an important newspaper in China, and aroused heated debates among Chinese intellectuals.

Similar to the situation of Cultural Studies in contemporary China, the national and cultural identity issue arose in China more out of the country's specific conditions than from the Western theoretical discourses. Thus, the issue cannot be fully understood without being placed in China's history and realities. In actuality, Said and his *Orientalism* were introduced no later than 1986 in the collection of Jameson's lectures. The article of a special interview with Said was published in 1988. Academic papers on *Orientalism* were published in 1990. Nonetheless, none drew enough attention or set off significant debates. After years' of silence, the debate over post-colonialism and China's national and cultural identity broke out between 1993 and 1994, during which period liberal thoughts of new enlightenment

suffered setbacks due to political reasons in the country. The “coincidence” is quite thought-provoking.

Post-colonial theory and cultural criticism deal with impacts of the relations between old-day colonial powers and colonies on the present-day racial relations, particularly cultural relations between different races in European and American countries, as well as on the cultural relations between developed European and American countries and the Third World countries. The relationship between the Chinese and Western cultures has always been a core issue in China’s modernization process since the First Opium War in 1840 when China was forced into the modern world. Wang Hui clearly defines the situation, “Through the entire modernization process in China, Chinese intellectuals have, on the one hand, strived to build a prosperous and strong modern nation-state, while on the other hand, criticized traditional Chinese society and customs by the criteria of the Western modern societies and their culture and values. Thus, the modern discourse in China has sought to analyze the issues in China through a pattern of binary oppositions of ‘China versus the West’ and ‘traditions versus modernity’.”²⁶

The “cultural fever” in a vogue in the 1980s in the Chinese mainland has been remembered for its two fractious and conflicting features. On the one hand, people tried to rediscover and recover the root of the traditional Chinese culture severely hurt during the Cultural Revolution. On the other hand, the enlightenment thoughts popular from the May Fourth Movement onwards were readopted to judge the traditional Chinese culture and national characteristics by the criteria of the Western cultures. It only depended upon the political and government-approved ideology and attitudes that dominated. In the 1990s, the Chinese intelligentsia shifted their attention and interest from the West to China and people saw “the revival of studies of the ancient Chinese civilization”. In the meantime, the Chinese intelligentsia began to doubt and criticize the Western cultures and theories. The Chinese government trumpeted patriotism. People took on a nationalist zeal. The intelligentsia turned (from the West) to China. The country was enveloped in the 1990s in a cultural atmosphere and landscape rather different from that in the 1980s. The Western things that used to get upper hand over the Chinese ones seemed to lose the ground overnight.

Like the switch between the national salvation and enlightenment in the modern history of China, the shift of focus of the Chinese academic circles aforementioned grew out of the then social realities in the country. It was never a purely academic thing. The dissolution of the Soviet Union around the turn of the 1980s and 90s played the critical role. The socialist camp disintegrated around the globe and consequently, the former socialist European countries fell into knock-on effects. The event pushed the enlightenment discourse in China into a crisis and dragged China into tensions and frictions with Western countries.²⁷ Many books strong of

²⁶Wang Hui, “Thinking and Modernity in Contemporary China”, *Frontiers*, 1997 (5).

²⁷For example, China and the U.S. clashed around 1989 on “human rights”. In summer 1993, the China-based regular container ship “Yinhe” was wrongly accused by the U.S. government of

nationalist passions were published in China, with *China Can Say "No"* and *Behind a Demonized China* as the best-known ones.²⁸ Some held that the shift came from the fact that some intellectuals in China at the time found themselves “empowered” with the “national” identity in a time of crisis and secured themselves with this national identity as the spokesmen of “the national culture” and “the interests of the national culture”.²⁹ However, this intriguing analysis should also be placed in that particular context at the turn of the 1980s and 90s. As a special social class, intellectuals usually define their identity by criticizing and negating something or someone else. Their identity is defined through negation, as intellectuals distinguish themselves from the others with their critical thinking and discourse. In the 1980s, Chinese intellectuals focused their criticisms on the traditional culture and the ultra-Left ideology trumpeted in the Cultural Revolution. In the 1990s, however, they turned to the emerging “market economy” and capitalism in the West (the U.S. in particular), as enlightenment was impeded and nationalism thrived in China. That’s how the discussion of “humanism”, reflection on post-colonialism and modernity, as well as a fever for studies of the ancient Chinese civilization, arose. It was right at the time that cultural nationalism resurged and the idea of “the revival of the Oriental culture” emerged. Some asserted that the 21st century would be one for the Chinese culture and younger generations should learn the ancient Chinese classics from their childhood, to rebuild the Chinese “humanism”. Humanists changed their ideas quietly. When *Studies of the Ancient Chinese Civilization* was first published in 1991 by Peking University, *People’s Daily* made a good coverage of it in a positive manner. The mainstream changed evidently the attitude toward the traditional Chinese civilization. Later, “the studies of the ancient Chinese civilization” would become an industrial sector, as institutions like “Sinology institutions”, “courses of the ancient Chinese classics” and “Confucius institutes” are established and become a cultural and industrial phenomenon at home and abroad. Academic papers and monographs on the traditional Chinese culture were published in a considerable number. The Chinese government tried to ease the tensions at home triggered by the political event in the late 1980s by redirecting cultural discussions and debates to “the outside world” (global political, economic and cultural issues). Together, the aforementioned events triggered off the heat of post-colonial theory and the national identity issue.

(Footnote 27 continued)

carrying chemical materials for weapon to Iran and met with military confrontations from the U.S. armies. In the autumn of the same year, China failed in its bidding for hosting 2000 Olympic Games. The failure was widely seen as the Western “prejudice” against China. The Chinese people got outraged at the NATO’s bombardment on the Chinese Embassy to Yugoslavia.

²⁸Song Qiang, Zhang Cangcang (real name: Zhang Xiaobo), Qiao Bian & Gu Qingsheng et al., *China Can Say "No": Post Cold War Political and Emotional Choices*. Beijing: China Industry & Commerce Associated Press, 1996. Li Xiguang & Liu Kang et al., *Behind a Demonized China*. Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1996.

²⁹See Xu Ben, *Toward Post-modernity and Post-colonialism*. Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1996.

The reflection on capitalist modernity and theories of globalization, post-modernity and world system were introduced into China at that time or even earlier. More and more Chinese scholars blamed the suppression from the capitalist world system on China for the subsequent dilemma China's modernization faces. The reflection on the Chinese culture (such as the national characteristics) popular in the 1980s (the post-May Fourth Movement era included) gradually faded. That is a key turning in China's intellectual history.

2. Problem Domain of the National and Cultural Identity Issue in China

Post-colonial criticism surpasses the other topics, such as feminism and even mass culture, in Cultural Studies in term of intensity of dispute and controversy, as it touches how the Chinese intelligentsia has thought about modernization and revolution in China in the past century. However, the post-colonial theory has had to adapt to the Chinese context that is enormously different from that of the West. That is how the problem domain of China's post-colonial criticism distinguishes itself from the others.

(I) Criticism of Third World Cultures

Theory and criticism of the Third World cultures, first proposed by the American neo-Marxist theorist Jameson, remains the earliest discourse pattern of the localized post-colonial culture theory in China. Jameson's relevant papers were first translated into Chinese in 1989 and drew Chinese scholars' attention. As an American scholar, Jameson looks back into the First World cultures by studying the Third World cultures. According to him, none of the Third World cultures is independent or self-determined; instead, they have been always in the life-and-death struggle with the First World's "cultural imperialism". Thus, to study the Third World cultures is, to some extent, to study the Western cultures themselves.

However, the Chinese academic circles try to understand and discuss about the significance of the theory of the Third World cultures to China by following their own tracks. Zhang Yiwu is evidently the most prominent figure. Inspired by Jameson's thoughts, though, Zhang isn't satisfied with how the scholars from the First World interpret the Third World cultures, as according to him, Jameson cannot understand the uniqueness of the texts of the Third World. Thus, the Third World intellectuals are the right people who give the interpretation to the Third World cultures and let their voices heard in multicultural dialogues in the world.³⁰ Zhang began to put the term "the Third World" in frequent use in his papers of literary criticism and theory in 1989. He made a methodological elaboration on the critical theory of "the Third World cultures" in his "The Third World Cultures and Chinese Literature" published on *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 1990 (1). This article has a wide impact academically. Zhang states in the article that in a globalized world, the globally-accepted academic discourse has been actually the

³⁰Zhang Yiwu, "The Third World Cultures: A New Starting Point", *Dushu (Reading)*, 1990 (6).

First World's discourse, which usually holds back the literary theories and creation of the Third World. The Western discourse seems to dominate in China from the May Fourth Movement onwards. The theory of the Third World cultures is thus in need. However, the author seems to be in ambivalence during his writing. He stands firmly on the Chinese position, highlighting that the theory of the Third World cultures, in his eyes, is ideological and non-academic; in the meantime, he argues that the theory is analytical and theoretical, instead of being pure political propaganda. He stresses that his theory of the Third World cultures is local and Chinese, but absorbing into it other cultures (particularly the Western deconstruction theory). Focusing on binary oppositions and antagonism, Zhang admits that the theory of the Third World cultures can survive and develop only in dialogues and exchanges. Generally, in structure and arrangement of the entire article, the author focuses more on nativism and antagonism of his theory of the Third World cultures, stressing that the theory is something critical and reflective on the side of the Third World in the confrontation between the First World and the Third World.

Zhang Yiwu, in his criticism of the Third World cultures, evidently places all confrontations concerned under the confrontation between the First World and the Third World and blames the suppression from the First World for the problems in the Third World. For instance, in his comments on Zha Jianying's novels about Chinese students' life in the U.S., Zhang holds that the novels illustrate "the predicament the Third World cultures face". But in fact, Zha's novels represent the common topics in any novels about overseas Chinese students who "flee" away from China but are unable to fully merge into or identify themselves with the American society and its values. Zhang sees in the novels a cultural control and anti-control and "the sharp binary oppositions between the First World and the Third World": While the Third World is idealist, poverty-stricken and (sexually) repressive, the First World is materialistic, wealthy and relaxed. Completed on 1 June 1989 and published in September that year, the article is thought-provoking, as the author blames the material desires generated by the First World cultural hegemony for the evaporated idealism in the Third World and China.³¹ In Zhang's commentary on Liu Qingbang's novels, he sees the antagonism between desire and discourse, i.e. the antagonism between body and unconsciousness and rule, order and consciousness, as "the icon of the predicament of the Third World cultures". However, such antagonism is essentially a topic in any civilized society, in fact. Memory, a common narrative pattern, in Zhang's eyes, "becomes an indefinable ideographic thing of the Third World's predicament". Modernist novels share their distrust in realism. However, Zhang Yiwu considers this common feature of modernist novels as something distinctive of "the Third World cultures".³² Also, he

³¹Zhang Yiwu, "Predicament of the Third World Cultures: the World in Zha Jianying's Novels", *Contemporary Writers Review*, 1989 (5).

³²Zhang Yiwu, "Discourse, Memory & Narrative: On Liu Qingbang's Novels", *Contemporary Writers Review*, 1990 (5).

lists postmodern aestheticism in commercial mass culture as a crisis particular to the Third World cultures produced from the control of the First World's culture industry over the Third World cultures, while other critics usually take it as a universal phenomenon.³³

The theory of "the Third World cultures" also gives a second thought to modernity. Zhang Yiwu tries to find support in literary works for his argument about the reflection on modernity in modern literature, including "the disappointment to the Western cultures and values".³⁴ Nonetheless, his argumentation looks a little bit farfetched.³⁵ In another article, Zhang puts Jameson's "national allegory"-like writing into "modern writing" that follows the Western discourse of enlightenment and alienates an author's own nation. According to Zhang, some modern artists, such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige who conduct allegory-like creation activities in their art films, identify themselves with and yield to the First World cultures,³⁶ satisfying the Western desire and illusion of the Third World.³⁷

Scholars including Yue Daiyun and Meng Fanhua give their positive view on Zhang Yiwu's theory of the Third World cultures,³⁸ while some others advocating liberalism think about it the other way round. According to Xu Ben, the Third World criticism in the West and India focuses on "anti-oppression" rather than "nativism", while China's post-colonial criticism stresses nativism instead of anti-oppression. Or rather, China's post-colonial criticism struggles against only the oppression from the First World's discourse and the domestic/local cultural oppression never enters into its vision. Xu holds that the so-called "oppression" from the First World isn't a significant one faced by China today. Thus, the Third World critics in China "conceal and evade, deliberately or unintentionally, the violence and oppression local to the Chinese society... creating a cultural criticism

³³Zhang Yiwu, "The Moment of Dream: Back and Beyond", *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 1991 (5).

³⁴Zhang Yiwu, "An Inquiry into Modernity: A Trend in Literature in the 1990s", *Tianjin Social Sciences*, 1993 (4).

³⁵The example Zhang Yiwu takes is Wang Anyi's *Linda the Bartender*. It is the story about Linda, a college girl in Shanghai who fancies the West. She takes part-time job in a bar where she gets to know a guy from the West. The two become somewhat a couple. But the relationship makes Linda unhappy, as she finds that the guy sees this relationship as something pure about money. Linda finally refuses the guy. Nevertheless, what Linda refuses is that specific foreigner, instead of "the modern Western values". After all, she picks up some dollar notes stealthily, to save for her dream of "going abroad".

³⁶Zhang Yiwu, "Toward the Post-allegory Era", *Shanghai Literature*, 1994 (8).

³⁷Zhang Yiwu, "Chinese Films in the Post-new-period: Split Challenges", *Contemporary Cinema*, 1994 (5).

³⁸Yue Daiyun, "Perspectives on the 1990s: To Be Unique and Original in the World's Cultural Dialogues", *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 1990 (3); "Emergence and Prospects of the Third World Cultures", *Film Art*, 1991 (1); and "Comparative Literature and Cultural Transition", *Popular Tribune*, 1991 (3). Meng Fanhua, "The Theory of the Third World Cultures and Its Dilemma", *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 1990 (6).

pattern that is in great favor of the government-approved ideological control and diminishes the so-called ‘antagonism’.”³⁹

The discussion of the theory of the Third World cultures arose as an early example of post-colonial theory in China and covered all topics raised in the field later. Zhang Yiwu’s theory of the Third World cultures talks about various issues, such as the comments on Zhang Yimou’s films, the discussion of “aphasia” in China’s literary study, the revaluation of the New Literature germinating from the May Fourth Movement and the reflection on modernity. However, Zhang’s theory is plagued with problems of confused terms and conflicting and hesitant expressions. Moreover, the theory is denounced for its one-sided focus on the international antagonism, without mentioning any domestic confrontations.

(II) Be Us, Be Others and Be Chinese: Criticism of Zhang Yimou’s Films

The earliest translated Western papers on post-colonialism were first published on film periodicals⁴⁰ and Zhang Yimou’s films were the first target of criticism in the field. To some extent, the post-colonial theory truly came into China accompanied by the criticism of Zhang Yimou’s films. Zhang and his films won quite many international awards and became an icon of China in many critics’ eyes. Wang Gan’s “To Raise the Red lantern for Whom?: An Analysis of Zhang Yimou’s Film” published in *Wenhuibao* (*Wenhui News*) criticized Zhang Yimou and his art for the first time from an Orientalist point of view (concepts of “Orientalism” and “Eurocentrism” came to readers in this article). According to Wang, Zhang Yimou’s film *Raise the Red Lantern* is not intended for Chinese audience but was instead made with a foreign audience in mind, as the custom of raising the red lantern depicted in the film is something ugly fabricated by the director to entertain foreigners.

The period between 1992 and 1993 was key for the introduction of the post-colonial theory into China and saw an escalation of the criticism of Zhang Yimou and his films. *Dushu* (*Reading*) published a series of articles in Issue 9, 1993, which were seen as a landmark in the introduction of the post-colonial theory into China. An author points out, “Some brilliant Chinese artists try to ‘bring their works to a world audience’, works which portray something about China as being exciting, intoxicating or disgusting to Westerners, with an aim of generating among Western audience and readers a sense of aesthetic ‘sublimity’, sympathy and even

³⁹Xu Ben, *Toward Post-modernity and Post-colonialism* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1996), pp. 220–236.

⁴⁰Zhang Jingyuan’s translation of Jameson’s “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” was published on *Contemporary Cinema*, 1989 (6). Jameson holds in the article that the Third World suffered from colonial and imperial powers and the Third World literature is naturally nationalist and its narrative features the national allegories. In Jameson’s new construction of the world’s culture, the Third World literature shall follow its own choice and way. This article was quite a stir in the Chinese academic circles back then. Following it, magazines such as *Film Art*, *Wenyi Zhengming* (*Debates in Literature and Arts*) and *Dushu* (*Reading*) also published articles on the Third World. (Zhang Hui, “A Journey of Theory: History and Issues of Post-colonial Cultural Criticism in China”).

racial/cultural superiority. Naturally, such works have often been commercially successful.”⁴¹ Zhang Yimou and his films are evidently one of the targets of the criticism, the author stating that “we don’t necessarily mean Zhang Yimou’s award-winning films” notwithstanding.

Zhang Yiwu and Wang Yichuan were two prominent critics of Zhang Yimou’s films at the time. Compared to his predecessors, Zhang Yiwu makes his comments on Zhang Yimou and his films from a post-colonial angle in a more theoretical, methodological and conscious manner. According to Zhang Yiwu, Zhang Yimou as an idol and wonder in the new era is actually a myth co-created by the Chinese and Western mass media, a myth to be understood in a global post-colonial context. A “post-colonial context” refers to “the impacts and control imposed on the Third World ‘nation states’ by the West through ‘soft’ ideological strategies.”⁴² In Zhang Yimou’s case, his films “are usually produced with international investment and have to cater to the consumption needs on the international market. This pulls Zhang Yimou and his films into a global post-colonial context.”⁴³ Zhang Yiwu gives a specific analysis of the texts of Zhang Yimou’s films. According to the critic, the director illustrates in his films a dreamlike and fantastic image of China: It is a space outside history and a backward and anti-modernity world in history.⁴⁴ Zhang Yiwu wrote in another article published a decade after Zhang Yimou’s *Hero* had been released that Zhang Yimou has been a globally-recognized advocate of “might makes right”. That film endorses the current global cultural and social order shaped by counties led by the U.S. and represents the logic of the current world.⁴⁵ *Hero* represents the higher end of the globalized ideology, while *House of Flying Daggers* shows the lower end, i.e. ideology of consumerism/aesthetics of desire.⁴⁶

Like Zhang Yiwu, Wang Yichuan also thinks that Zhang Yimou is a legend largely of the west’s making. Accommodation policy adopted by the West creates a post-colonial context, i.e. “an enchanting cultural environment or atmosphere the West creates in ‘the Third World’ (e.g. China) after the colonial strategies.”⁴⁷ Zhang Yimou’s films are accepted by the West as “a soft advertisement to prove the charm of the Western hegemony”.⁴⁸ According to Wang, the exotic atmosphere and

⁴¹Zhang Kuan, “Aliens in the European and American Eyes”, *Dushu (Reading)*, 1993 (9).

⁴²Zhang Yiwu, “Zhang Yimou in a Global Post-colonial Context”, *Contemporary Cinema*, 1993 (3).

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Zhang Yiwu, “A Lonely Hero: A Decade-later Review on the Myth of Zhang Yimou”, *Film Art*, 2003 (4).

⁴⁶Zhang Yiwu, “Zhang Yimou and the Global Imagination”, *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 2005 (1).

⁴⁷Wang Yichuan, “An Exotic Atmosphere and the Illusion of National Character”, *Dongfang Congkan (Oriental Collection)*, 1993 (4).

⁴⁸Wang Yichuan, “Who Is Behind the Myth of Zhang Yimou?”, *Genesis*, 1993 (2).

folkways represented in Zhang Yimou's films aim to please the West and are connected with colonialism.⁴⁹ Those fantastic folkways in Zhang Yimou's films satisfy Westerners' voyeurism and sense of triumph over the Third World.⁵⁰ Therefore, the national character expressed in the strong atmosphere of Chineseness in Zhang's films is in essence not a national self-awareness; instead, it is nothing more than "the otherness" in the Western eyes. "We have to face such a dilemma: The more national a thing is, the more "otherness" it features. Also, someone who wants to win the West with national things, yields to the West and loses the national character more easily."⁵¹ "China illustrated in Zhang Yimou's films is never 'be us'; instead, it is something 'be other'. China as it is has never had a say."⁵²

However, the post-colonial interpretation to Zhang Yimou's films have always been praised and blamed. Some finds it improper to make simply political interpretation to the films and calls to see art works as art works.⁵³ This idea would become a key one countering post-colonial criticism, holding that "post-colonial criticism focuses solely on cultural hegemony and ignores the beauty of art beyond ethnics and cultures". Another common refutation to the post-colonial criticisms of Zhang Yimou's films goes that post-colonial critics are plagued with "a sense of narrow nationalism". According to Dong Leshan, those who dislike Zhang Yimou and his films "don't want to show the dark side of China to others. Chinese people are sensitive about their reputation and unwilling to expose their shortcomings. What they would like to show is only their age-old history and brilliant culture. It is arrogant and overweening nationalism."⁵⁴ Hao Jian imposes a sharper challenge to post-colonial criticism, holding that it is a narrow cultural nationalism and "the Boxer-like moans and groans".⁵⁵

As for the issue of "(pseudo) folkways", some hold that fabricated things are allowed in films as an art type. And why can't it be understood as the criticism of patriarchy or autocracy in pre-1949 China?⁵⁶ Others point out that there is no evidence to suggest that Zhang Yimou's films as trying to "cater to" the Western audience and that such a claim is mere speculation on behalf of Westerners.⁵⁷ Some have tried to defend Zhang Yimou's films by citing Homi Bhabha's idea of

⁴⁹Wang Yichuan, "An Exotic Atmosphere and the Illusion of National Character", *Dongfang Congkan (Oriental Collection)*, 1993 (4).

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Wang Yichuan, "China: Be Us or Be Other", *Chinese Cultural Research*, Winter Volume, 1994.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Zhaxiduo, "Laurie Siegel, Exotic Touches, Red Lantern and Others", *Dushu (Reading)*, 1992 (8).

⁵⁴Dong Leshan, "A Cantata of Orientalism", *Dushu (Reading)*, 1994 (5).

⁵⁵Zhang Hui, "Images and Politics: An Analysis of Post-colonial Criticism of Films in China", *The Journal of Humanities*, 2010 (2).

⁵⁶Yi Xiaobin, "A Review on the Post-colonial Criticisms of Zhang Yimou's Films", *Movie Review*, 2007.

⁵⁷Zhang Hui, "Images and Politics: An Analysis of Post-colonial Criticism of Films in China", *The Journal of Humanities*, 2010 (2).

“hybridization”, arguing that what Zhang tries to do in his films is to give expressions to Chinese subject matters by applying Western theories and art forms and that such attempts are instrumental for ridding Chinese cinema of colonial influences and helping it achieve independence.⁵⁸ Also, some others see in the post-colonial criticisms of Zhang Yimou’s films binary thinking, pitting East against the West, the First World against the Third World and self against otherness. That thinking pattern of the cultural Cold War is seemingly anti-colonialism and reinforces colonialism in actuality.⁵⁹

Thanks to the criticism and debate of Zhang Yimou’s films, the West-originating post-colonial theory gets rooted in the Chinese context. People got to know more about the post-colonial theory and see deeper into a cultural phenomenon.

(III) Enlightenment or Colonialism: The Issue of National Characteristics

The study of Lu Xun occupies a predominant position in the studies of modern Chinese literature. Enlightenment discourse in China got to be doubted when the post-colonial theory was introduced into China. The revaluation of Lu Xun’s “criticism of the national characteristics” and subsequent disputes are particularly dramatic.

Critics holding the post-colonial theory impose inquiries into Lu Xun’s theory of “the national characteristics”. Their doubts stir disputes in the Chinese academic circles. The entire thing got fermented from Feng Jikai’s article “Lu Xun’s Merits and ‘Demerits’” published on *Harvest*, 2000 (2).⁶⁰ Feng points in this article that Lu Xun drew inspirations of his theory of the national characteristics from the Western missionaries coming to China from 1840 onwards (or directly from *Chinese Characteristics* authored by Arthur Henderson Smith). But Lu Xun saw nothing about the Western hegemony hidden in the Western analysis of the Chinese national characteristics. Their analysis is one-sided, negative or reproachful.

⁵⁸Wang Ning, “The Post-colonial Context and Cinema in Contemporary China”, *Contemporary Cinema*, 1995 (5).

⁵⁹Li Xiaoling, “Criticism of the Post-colonial Criticism of Films in China”, *Social Sciences in Yunnan*, 2009.

⁶⁰In addition to Feng Jikai’s article, there were also ones written by Wang Shuo and Lin Yutang published in the column “Have a Closer View of Lu Xun” on the same issue of *Harvest*. The two articles aroused heated debates as well. According to the writer’s association, literary federation, federation of social science circles and society for the study of Lu Xun in Shaoxing, Lu Xun’s hometown, those articles were “the cluster bombs belittling Lu Xun”. They “defended Lu Xun” by writing open letters and holding meetings and asked China Writer’s Association to make proper responses. *Wenyibao (Literature and Arts)* later released the news about “the Symposium of Hot Issues in the Study of Lu Xun” under the title of “Lu Xun’s Revolutionary Spirit Shouldn’t Be Desecrated”. *Harvest* also published in the column “Have a Closer View of Lu Xun” articles like “I Love Lu Xun”. The event then came to an end. It is interesting to observe the relationship between academics and politics reflected in this event. For more details, see Chen Shuyu, “Thoughts on the *Harvest* Event: On Hot Issues in the Study of Lu Xun”, *Lu Xun Research Monthly*, 2001 (1).

The article caused a stir in the Chinese academic circles. Was Lu Xun fooled by the Western missionaries? Yu Jie didn't think that Lu Xun's criticism of the national characteristics came from the Western missionaries' ideas entirely. Also, according to Yu, "missionaries" were not necessarily bad guys, as quite a number of them contributed enormously to the local culture, education and medical service in China. Nonetheless, the innate weaknesses of the nation never disappeared and got even worse, fully indicating that Lu Xun "wasn't fooled" at all. Also, Lu Xun believed in the universal values in addition to cultural relativism.⁶¹ Yu Jie's ideas would be later adopted and expanded by others. Scholars did textual research on the historical context and China-based origin of Lu Xun's criticism of the Chinese national characteristics⁶² and found that Lu Xun had his own critical ideas about foreigners' criticisms of the Chinese national characteristics.⁶³ They held a doubtful view on the entire negation of what the Western missionaries in China did and defended them out of historical facts.⁶⁴ As for the universal values, some said that some cultures were better developed than the others and Lu Xun did nothing wrong to learn from better developed cultures.⁶⁵

With the intervention from authorities like China Writer's Association, debates and disputes aroused by Feng Jikai's article came to an end at the end of 2000. Discussions went deeper for a while and some found that Feng Jikai learnt the idea in his article from a Chinese-American scholar named Liu He.⁶⁶ And the thinking and argumentation in Liu's article was far more complicated than that in Feng's. Liu points that the theory of the national characteristics was on the basis of the racist nationalism in the 19th century, which served as "a theoretical base of

⁶¹Yu Jie, "Was Lu Xun Fooled?", *Lu Xun Research Monthly*, 2000 (7).

⁶²See Chen Shuyu, "Thoughts on the *Harvest* Event: On Hot Issues in the Study of Lu Xun", *Lu Xun Research Monthly*, 2001 (1); and Liu Yukai, "The Origin and Significance of Lu Xun's Criticism of the National characteristics: On Mr. Feng Jikai's Ideas of Lu Xun", *Lu Xun Research Monthly*, 2005 (1).

⁶³See Zhang Quanzhi, "Lu Xun and 'Orientalism'", *Lu Xun Research Monthly*, 2000 (7); Zhu Qianmin, "A Review on Feng Jikai's 'Lu Xun's Merits and 'Demerits'", *Journal of Zhejiang Normal University*, 2002 (3); and Chen Shuyu, "Thoughts on the *Harvest* Event: On Hot Issues in the Study of Lu Xun", *Lu Xun Research Monthly*, 2001 (1).

⁶⁴Zhu Qianmin, "A Review on Feng Jikai's 'Lu Xun's Merits and 'Demerits'", *Journal of Zhejiang Normal University*, 2002 (3).

⁶⁵Zhu Qianmin, "A Review on Feng Jikai's 'Lu Xun's Merits and 'Demerits'", *Journal of Zhejiang Normal University*, 2002 (3).

⁶⁶Liu He's article is in two versions: "How a Modern Myth Came into Being: An Inquiry into the Discourse of the National characteristics" is first in *Literary History (Vol. 1)* (Chen Pingyuan & Chen Guoqiu [eds.], Beijing: Peking University Press, 1993) and "Chapter 3: An Inquiry into the Theory of the National characteristics" in Liu He's *Interlanguage Writing* (Shanghai: Joint Publishing, 1999). The latter was written on the basis of the former (with some fierce words deleted) and merged with another article. The article is also collected in Liu He's *Interlanguage Practice* (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2002), under the title of "An Inquiry into the Theory of the National characteristics". The arguments in this book are based on the last version of that article.

evolutionism for the Western conquering of the East.” But this was right ignored by Chinese critics focusing on the national characteristics, “as nobody ever doubted the prerequisite of the theory of the national characteristics.”⁶⁷ Liu also investigates into the relationship between Lu Xun’s criticism of the national characteristics and Arthur Smith’s⁶⁸ work. According to Liu, Lu Xun began to give a serious thought to transforming the Chinese national characteristics with literature after having read the Japanese translation of Smith’s work. “Under his influence, Chinese intellectuals in the past century have had a complex of the national characteristics. They’ve kept defining, looking for, criticizing and transforming the Chinese national characteristics, without thinking about the historical prerequisite of the theory of the national characteristics. Chinese intellectuals were obsessed once again in the 1980s with the problems of the Chinese national characteristics, as if there would be any answer to this.”⁶⁹ Evidently, Liu He isn’t interested in the “national characteristics” at all (thinking that the issue is a wrong essentialist mindset). That is to say, whether the national characteristics are in existence at all is pushed aside from the very beginning. Liu He cares nothing about the issue of validity, as she holds a post-modern and anti-essentialist view that **discourse shapes reality**.

Stressing the influence of the Western missionaries’ colonialist discourse on Lu Xun’s criticism of the national characteristics, Liu He sees into how Lu Xun made use of and at the same time subverted that discourse (Liu’s analysis is too complicated to be explained here). According to Liu He, those who study Lu Xun paid no attention to the complicated relationship previously. Instead, they tried to reinforce and re-prove the colonialist theory of the national characteristics. Thus, archaeology of knowledge and sociology of knowledge are advised to be introduced into the study of the relationship between Lu Xun’s works and the Western theory of the national characteristics.

Objectively, Liu He gives no convincing explanation on how Lu Xun made use of and at the same time subverted the theory of the national characteristics. Nevertheless, those who try to defend Lu Xun and criticize Liu He get no awareness of the complexity of Liu’s article, either. They simply put Liu’s article and Feng’s together indiscriminately and impose criticisms on Liu’s similar to those on Feng’s. Some scholars hold that Liu He’s article is more academic yet more one-sided. The idea that the criticism of the national characteristics must be a racist discourse is evidently wrong and Smith and his book harbored no hostility to the Chinese nation.⁷⁰ Others put Liu He in the vulnerable group in the American

⁶⁷Liu He, *Interlanguage Practice* (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2002), p. 77.

⁶⁸As for the Chinese translation of “Smith”, Liu chose to render it as “斯密思”, an uncommon alternative to the one I adopt in this book, the almost universally accepted “史密斯”.

⁶⁹Liu He, *Interlanguage Practice* (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2002), p. 80.

⁷⁰See Yang Zengxian, “An Inquiry into ‘the Myth of the National characteristics’: On Liu He’s Distorted Interpretation of Lu Xun”, *Journal of Jishou University*, 2002 (3); and Wang Xuejun, “Wrong Denotation in Liu He’s ‘Myth of the National characteristics’”, *Journal of Nanjing Tech University*, 2004 (1).

society and hold that she tries to retain and improve her own rights and status in the U.S. through a post-colonial interpretation of Lu Xun.⁷¹

The discussion of “the theory of the national characteristics” actually looks a bit weird. First, there seem to be quite many misunderstandings in the debates around Liu He’s article. Most people appear to interpret Liu’s article from the angle of Feng Jicai’s article and pay not enough attention to the complexity of Liu’s. In another word, the initiative and protests of the colonized peoples are ignored. Few people have noticed Liu He’s investigation into how Lu Xun subverted the Western theory of the national characteristics (Liu’s investigation is far from satisfactory, though). Many think nothing about Liu He except that she tries to negate Lu Xun and his criticism of the national characteristics, so that the criticism of Liu He and her ideas is, to some extent, displaced. Secondly, people lack common understanding of basic facts and standpoints. For instance, there are significant disputes over the missionaries’ historical role and the nature of Sinology. In fact, quite a number of critics redirect their focus from Liu He’s theory and thoughts to her attitude toward facts. Thirdly, the misunderstanding largely comes from the critics’ clique thinking. They group themselves into those who doubt or defend Lu Xun, or those who focus on the modern Sino-West relations, modernity and ethnicity, and nationalism and the universal values. The last conflict between nationalism and the universal values dominates the scene, as it most concerns the reality. With innumerable ideological clashes and debates, inertial and stereotyped mindsets have played their roles in modern China: Any negative comments made about Lu Xun entail a negation of national self-criticism and by extension of enlightenment. Any doubts cast on Western cultures amounts to an endorsement of nationalism and a rejection of the value of modernity, and vice versa. This and the lack of common understanding of the pertinent facts may in fact be mutually explanatory.

Historical context is thus evidently of great significance. In the specific ideological context and reality in China, post-colonial criticism, which had originally been meant to undercut nationalism, became or was seen instead as a nationalist discourse that reinforced the binary opposition of “China versus the West” that had always been an inherent feature of the discourse in China about modernity. The phenomenon is not confined to the disputes over “the theory of the national characteristics”, and exists in post-colonial debates about all topics.

(IV) Discussion of Chineseness: Nationalism versus Modernity?

“Chineseness” is a representative issue that takes a predominant position in the post-colonial cultural criticism in China: Issues of the relationship between ethnicity and modernity and that between Chinese culture and the Western cultures in the modern intellectual history are mentioned again. Some hold that “the

⁷¹Zhang Jiangnan, “Overseas Chinese Students and the Crisis of Social Identity: Thoughts on Liu He’s *Interlanguage Writing*”, quoted from Zhang Wei, “Post-colonial Criticism and the Discussion of ‘the National characteristics’ at the Turning of Centuries”, *Journal of Zhengzhou University*, 2007 (2).

Chineseness issue is typical in the post-colonial criticism in China”.⁷² The issue was first put forth in the long article “From ‘Modernity’ to ‘Chineseness’: An Exploration into the New Episteme” co-authored by Zhang Fa, Zhang Yiwu and Wang Yichuan and published on *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 1994 (2). The article aroused quite a stir.

According to the authors, the modernization process in China has been driven by the determination and efforts to regain the lost central position; nevertheless, the process has also witnessed how the Chinese nation gradually lost its own identity (i.e. an “othering” process). In the 1990s, the Western enlightenment modernity declined in China, due to its innate problems; thus, China was in need of a new dominant discourse. The authors see “Chineseness” as the new dominant discourse that is a new culture stressing China’s standpoint, perspective and features. They draw a path for China to regain its central position, at least in East Asia.

The article reads much like a national strategy proposal for cultural development. Most sentences began with the plural pronoun “we”, “China” or “the Chinese culture”. The third part focuses on strategies and measures and contains many prescriptive sentences that begin with “we ought to” or “the Chinese culture should”. The serious and solemn tone in which the entire article was written conveys a sense of authority. Secondly, the article also has political significance insofar as it provides suggestions about how the Chinese government might go about building a new international order in East Asia with the Chinese mainland at the center. The piece was warmly received mainly by government officials and mainstream media that also see in highlighting Chineseness a national strategy for cultural development. Moreover, the article is unambiguous in its endorsement of the idea that China should take greater control of the vocabulary and tone of a discourse and claims that the establishment of an epistemic paradigm with the notion of “Chineseness” as its core is instrumental for introducing a system of norms by which China’s lively and dynamic cultural scene can be governed.

That post-colonial criticism, which had been a radical and anti-mainstream school of thought when it first originated in the West, should have turned into a national strategy endorsed by the Chinese government after it was introduced to the country is indeed a bit odd. It naturally becomes a target for those who are critical of the idea of “Chineseness” on political ethics ground. Some have commented sharply that this strategy amounts to cultural expansionism: “When Said criticized Orientalism, he was trying to overturn West-centrism that was prevalent in thinking about culture. While we also reject West-centrism, we have replaced it with a worldview in which we ourselves are the center of East Asia.”⁷³ Xu Ben and other critics show their concern with the relationship between intellectuals and power. According to Xu, post-colonial criticism in China has lost much of what originally

⁷²Zhang Hui, “A Thought on the Issue of ‘Chineseness’ in the Current Cultural Criticism”, *Journal of Jiangnan University*, 2007 (6).

⁷³Shao Jian, “Cultural Deviation at the End of the Century: A Discussion about Modernity and Chineseness”, *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 1997 (1).

made it attractive to many, including political ethical values ideals such as social reform, opposition to oppression and to cultural violence. Instead it has been pre-occupied with the ostentatious display of uniqueness and trying to be what others are not.⁷⁴ Wang Hui makes a general review of the post-colonial criticism in China, “None of post-colonial critics in China has ever made any analysis of the inner structure of the Chinese culture from a marginal perspective, even though that is what the post-colonial theory truly means to do.”⁷⁵ As Tao Dongfeng put it, “A radical academic theory in the First World is rather likely to lose its radical and critical edge after being introduced into a Third World country like China.”⁷⁶ Such an imported theory is critical of “the other” and never of one’s own. It is essentially a kind of performance and act of opportunism in academia.⁷⁷

Many advocates of modernity hold that modernization is something universal and unavoidable in human history. China is not yet modernized now. It is not the prime time to have any reflection on “modernity” (modern culture).⁷⁸ This is evidently a typical linear view of history from the perspective of modernity ideology.

“Nationalism” may be one of the most frequent words in the criticisms of “Chineseness”. According to Tao Dongfeng, “Chineseness” represents an essentialist idea of the national and cultural identity. However, the pursuit of the authentic national identity may lead to a grave crisis of values and ethnic antagonism. To this, Tao puts forth a new idea of cultural identity changing to the times, so that Chinese intellectuals may enjoy a benign cycle of striving for equal cultural relations internationally and for being liberal intellectuals domestically.⁷⁹

Many criticize the discourse of “Chineseness” for its inner logic. Some point that “modernity” and “Chineseness” are in nature two different concepts: The former is a concept of time and the latter a concept of space. Thus, it may be unreasonable to put it in a way like “from ‘modernity’ to ‘Chineseness’”.⁸⁰ It is a paradox to attack

⁷⁴Xu Ben, *Toward Post-modernity and Post-colonialism* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1996), pp. 202–203.

⁷⁵Wang Hui, “Thinking and Modernity in Contemporary China”, *Frontiers*, 1997 (5).

⁷⁶Tao Dongfeng, “Illusion and Confusion of Cultural Authenticity”, *Wenyibao (Literature and Arts)*, 11 March 1999; and see Tao Dongfeng, “Cultural Studies: the Western Discourse and the Chinese Context”, *Literature & Art Studies*, 1998 (3).

⁷⁷See Tao Dongfeng, *Cultural Studies: the West and China* (Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, 2002), p. 211; and Tao Dongfeng, “Deconstructing Illusion and Confusion of Cultural Authenticity”, *Journal of Zhanjiang Normal College*, 2001 (4). Other scholars, including Zhao Yiheng, Xu Youyu, Lei Yi and Shao Jian, have similar ideas.

⁷⁸See Shao Jian, “A Mistake in the East”, *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 1994 (4); and Shao Jian, “Cultural Deviation at the End of the Century: A Discussion about Modernity and Chineseness”, *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 1997 (1).

⁷⁹Tao Dongfeng, “Illusion and Confusion of Cultural Authenticity: Some Thoughts on Post-colonial Criticism in China”, *Wenyibao (Literature and Arts)*, 11 March 1999.

⁸⁰Shao Jian, “A Mistake in the East”, *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 1994 (4).

“othering” with a theory discourse borrowed from the West.⁸¹ It is also incredible to take the market force as the “terminator” of modernity in China. The market force in China has evidently emerged and developed by following the process of market economy in the West. How can it be anything marking the reduced “othering”?⁸²

There are indeed quite a number of logic and semantic contradictions and ambiguities in the article “From ‘Modernity’ to ‘Chineseness’” that sees all the political, economic and social crises in modern times as the ones generated by the lost central position. According to the authors of the article, the cultural authority of the 1980s belonged to enlightenment culture, the decline of which came from its aggressiveness and desperation. The key word “Chineseness” is evidently defined in an ambiguous way, with which the authors try to maintain a distinctive Chinese culture transcending the East and the West. The idea of the Chinese culture community in the article is said to “correspond with human nature”. To this sense, is it entirely equal to “human nature”? Or does it not go against “human nature”? The latter seems to be too weak and the former sounds like brag. According to Lacan and Derrida in their post-structuralism, nobody fully expresses his ideas and what he does is only to cover up or show his desires. It is worthy of a deeper analysis to find what that text filled with numerous logic and semantic problems truly wants to say or conceal.

(V) Muted Literary Theory in China and Its Reconstruction

Chinese intellectuals engaged in Cultural Studies and cultural criticism mostly have a background of literary theory and they redirect the national identity issue in post-colonial theory to their own specialties. Some debates have exerted a profound influence since the middle 1990s, including those over “aphasia” of Chinese literary theory, “the reconstruction of modern Chinese literary theory” and “the ancient Chinese literary theory adapted to modern times”.

The criticism of “aphasia” first targeted in the 1990s those newly-emerging literary criticisms in the previous 10-plus years, holding that those “post-colonial” criticisms made the academic order a mess in China by indiscriminately introducing sorts of “-isms” from the West to China. This criticism was later extended to a review of modernization and Westernization literary criticism had experienced since the May Fourth Movement in China.⁸³ Cao Shunqing may be the most prominent figure in this field. He points that the 21st century will see dialogues between the Eastern and Western cultures. Nonetheless, the Chinese literary theory has in modern days been “entirely westernized”. “How can a person suffering aphasia talk with others?” Then how shall we build the discourse of “the Chinese”

⁸¹Shao Jian, “Cultural Deviation at the End of the Century: A Discussion about Modernity and Chineseness”, *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 1995 (1).

⁸²Tao Dongfeng, “Merging of Post-colonialism and Nationalism”, *Hebei Academic Journal*, 1999 (6).

⁸³Huang Manjun, *A History of Literary Theory and Criticism in 20th Century China* (Beijing: CFLAC Press, 2002), p. 820.

literary theory to have our voice heard in the world's literary theory circles?⁸⁴ Cao blames the anti-tradition trends since the May Fourth Movement and the Cultural Revolution and the introduction of the Western literary theories from the 1980s onwards for the breakdown and loss of the Chinese literary theory.⁸⁵ The issues of “aphasia” and “reconstruction of the Chinese literary theory” dominated national and international conferences between 1996 and 1997 and drew much attention from key literary periodicals and prominent scholars.

Many see eye to eye with the conclusion that the Chinese literary theory suffers “aphasia”. Ji Xianlin the eminent professor from Peking University writes to state that the Chinese literary theory is plagued with aphasia, due to the Western cultural hegemony and its prejudice and discrimination against China. Professor Ji asks Chinese literary theorists to break up the fetters of the Western literary theories and return to the Chinese traditions, constructing a literary theory discourse of our own.⁸⁶ Qian Zhongwen appeals the Chinese academic circles “to create a modern literary theory system with the Chinese features”.⁸⁷ Zhang Shaokang thinks it a sad thing that Chinese have to deal with literature and arts with the Western “discourse”, without knowing about the traditional Chinese literary theory.⁸⁸

Others think it may be inappropriate to define the take-over or citation of foreign literary theories by the Chinese literary theory circle in the 20th century as “aphasia”.⁸⁹ According to those people, the introduction of the Western literary theories plays a positive role, rather than being cultural colonialism.⁹⁰ Otherwise, it would deny the building of literary theory in modern and contemporary China, including Marxist literary theory introduced to the country.⁹¹ Some scholars hold that “aphasia” in the contemporary Chinese literary theory, if it exists indeed, may come from the disconnection between literary theory and reality, instead of being a result of the imported Western literary theories.⁹² Moreover, some maintain that the

⁸⁴Cao Shunqing, “China's Cultural Development Strategy in the 21st Century and the Reconstruction of the Chinese Literary Theory”, *Dongfang Congkan (Oriental Collection)*, 1995 (3) (Issue 13).

⁸⁵Cao Shunqing, “Aphasia of Literary Theory and Cultural Pathology”, *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 1996 (2); Cao Shunqing & Li Siqu, “A Review on the Reconstruction of the Chinese Literary Theory”, *Literary Review*, 1997 (4).

⁸⁶Ji Xianlin, “An Amateur's Thoughts on the Chinese and Western Literary Theories”, *Literary Review*, 1996 (6).

⁸⁷Qu Yajun, “Continuity with Changes: A Summary of the Symposium on ‘Adapting the Ancient Chinese Literary Theory to Modern Days’”, *Literary Review*, 1997 (1).

⁸⁸Zhang Shaokang, “Take the Only Path: On How to Build the Modern Theory of Literature and Arts Based on the Ancient Chinese Literary Theory”, *Literary Review*, 1997 (2).

⁸⁹Xia Zhongyi, “Hypotheses and Aphasia”, *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art*, 1994 (5).

⁹⁰Lai Daren, “The Reconstruction of the Chinese Literary Theory: Between Tradition and Modernity”, *Academics*, 2007 (4).

⁹¹Dong Xuewen, “Thoughts on the Modern Chinese Literary Theory”, *Journal of Peking University*, 1998 (2).

⁹²Zhu Liyuan, “Go Our Own Way: Thoughts on the Construction of the Chinese Literary Theory in the 21st Century”, *Literary Review*, 1997 (1).

traditional Chinese literary theory “lost its voice” in the disconnection between the traditional literary theory and the social reality in modern China.⁹³ To the contrary, the study of literature and arts in 20th century China absorbs various Western literary theories, “to solve its own problems, give its own opinions and express its own ideas”; therefore, there is no so-called “aphasia” at all.⁹⁴ Some say that it is impossible “to be entirely westernized” and the assertion of “entire Westernization” aims only to create a false prerequisite and illusion of the pursuit of cultural authenticity.⁹⁵

Opinions diverge greatly deeper behind the debates and disputes. For example, what does “the muted Chinese literary theory” truly mean? For some (such as Cao Shunqing, Zhang Shaokang, Ji Xianlin and Yang Naiqiao), “aphasia” refers to the discontinuity of the traditional Chinese literary theory and the westernized literary theory in modern China. For those scholars, “the Chinese literary theory” is actually referred to **the ancient/traditional Chinese literary theory**. They call for building the contemporary Chinese literary theory on the base of the traditional one. Tao Dongfeng, Xiong Yuanliang and some others propose to reconstruct the Chinese literary theory based on the reality and theory resources of the modern Chinese literature. According to this latter group, it is critical to adapt the contemporary Chinese literary theory to the literary practice and social and cultural realities in contemporary China, while the ancient Chinese literary theory and the literary and social conditions and values it used to exist in are far more different from those at the present. Thus, the ancient Chinese literary theory is far from an appropriate base for the day.⁹⁶ The dispute is in nature over what “Chineseness” is. The former scholars define China with the traditional Chinese culture, while the latter group puts China in the perspective of “modernity”.

Some scholars make a psychological analysis of numerous expressions, logic confusions and ambiguities in the debates of “aphasia” and “reconstruction” of the Chinese literary theory, holding that those contradictions and paradoxes may be generated from “aphasia”-theory advocates’ “will to power”⁹⁷ “to rival the West”

⁹³Tao Dongfeng, “A Review on ‘Aphasia’ and ‘Reconstruction’ of the Chinese Literary Theory”, *Journal of Yunnan University*, 2004 (5).

⁹⁴Gao Nan, “The Study of Literature and Arts at the Turning of Centuries in China”, *Literature & Art Studies*, 1999 (2).

⁹⁵Jiang Yin, “How to Deal with the Legacy of the Classical Chinese Poetry”, *Yuehaifeng (A Literary Wind in Guangdong)*, 2002 (1).

⁹⁶See Tao Dongfeng, “A Review on ‘Aphasia’ and ‘Reconstruction’ of the Chinese Literary Theory”, *Journal of Yunnan University*, 2004 (5); Zhou Xian, *A Study of Aesthetics in Modern China* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 1997), p. 258; Qian Zhongwen, Du Shuying & Chang Guangyuan, *The Ancient Chinese Literary Theory Adapted to Modern Times* (Xi’an: Shaanxi Normal University Press, 1997), p. 23.

⁹⁷Xiong Yuanliang, “‘Aphasia’ of Literary Theory: Historical Dislocation and Theoretical Mistake”, *Comparative Literature in China*, 2003 (2).

and from the uncertainty deep in their mind.⁹⁸ According to Tao Dongfeng, “aphasia” theory is essentially rooted in the values of nationalism; that is, those who advocate this theory see no other higher cultural values beyond the nation-based criteria.⁹⁹

Indeed, the ambiguous nationalism-based values lie deep behind the confusing debates over “aphasia and reconstruction of the Chinese literary theory”. In actuality, similar problems and reasons are found, more or less, in the aforementioned nation-concerning issues.

Modernization dominates China’s modern intellectual history and demonstrates in reality as the conflicts, entanglement and confrontations between individuality-prone enlightenment and nation salvation. In the debates over post-colonialism and the national identity, the core issue deals with how to establish the national culture and how to treat the relationship between the Chinese and Western cultures, as well as that between individual rights and the national power. The concern in those debates is evidently inside the core of China’s modern intellectual history. Thus, the national and cultural identity issue in Cultural Studies in modern China is more of an innate real problem.

Nonetheless, the debates over this real problem have been often conducted with the Western post-colonial theory; thus, there are many displaced/dislocated problems, as the Western theory is not applicable to the political and cultural contexts in China. That may be something all foreign theories have to deal with after being introduced into China. That’s why we shall get well aware of the specific contexts we are in. As shown above, some cultural critics in contemporary China have indeed good awareness of the Chinese context. They never blindly copy post-colonial theory from the West. Instead, they meticulously make a distinction between the Chinese and Western contexts and dig out the spiritual essence deep behind the Western critical theories, striving to build better and freer humanity and culture. In those critics and their criticism, we perceive the subjectivity of the Chinese cultural criticism that enriches and expands the post-colonial theory.

Of course, we find totally different understandings of history and reality; confusions, contradictions and ambiguities of concepts; and radical conflicts of fundamental values. The concerning debates thus are filled with discrepancies and various opinions. The debates are never reduced to something valueless in such chaos. Instead, it is such important debates that draw so much attention and generate so different opinions. That’s how the debates fall into such chaos, in which we find a rich source of intellectual history. The debates are in this way much more significant than ordinary literary criticism and the most important part of cultural criticism in modern China.

⁹⁸Zhou Xian, *A Study of Aesthetics in Modern China* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 1997), p. 258.

⁹⁹Tao Dongfeng, “A Review on ‘Aphasia’ and ‘Reconstruction’ of the Chinese Literary Theory”, *Journal of Yunnan University*, 2004 (5).

3 Feminism and Gender Issues

“Gender” is used both in physiology and sociology and a key word in Cultural Studies. It is also an important perspective and topic in Cultural Studies in modern China. As a theory originating in the West, gender studies in modern China must be conducted in China’s historical and cultural contexts, as the other West-originating theories are.

1. Gender Studies before the Mid-1990s

The idea of gender in the traditional Chinese culture originated from the pre-Qin theory of *Yin* and *Yang* that were seen as two interacting energies to produce the male and the female. The theory was, however, little of gender discrimination. The idea of gender began in the Han Dynasty to deviate from the *Yin-Yang* theory and a new rule of male domination and female subordination took shape. This rule would later dominate China for the next 2000 years.¹⁰⁰ Feminism was introduced from the West into China in modern days and the country witnessed women’s liberation as well. Women in the West fought for their own rights and liberation, while in China, feminism was first encouraged by men. Besides, women’s liberation in China got closely linked up with the issues of national liberation and modernization from the very beginning. The middle-class men who were eager to see a modernized China thought that it was critical to have educated and open-minded women as Western countries did, to build a politically- and economically-developed independent nation. Well-educated women would make good wives and mothers and become the pride of well-bred (or westernized) men.¹⁰¹ However, women were talked about as a symbol at the time by men with discursive power. Thus, women were seen as both the reason for a weak country and represented as the symbol of a backward nation. Men put forth the women “issue” (women were “an issue” then), to find a path to make China a powerful nation. Here, women were merely a carrier and means, while a powerful nation was the goal. Closely interrelated, state nationalism and gender played a significant role at the time and would leave profound impacts later.¹⁰² In addition to nationalism, another redline going through male intellectuals’ discussion of women issue was the European-imported idea of human rights. According to the idea, women’s rights should be a part of human rights in a modern civilization. Confucianism was attacked during the New Culture Movement. So were the idea that “husband guides wife” as one of the three cardinal principles and five constant virtues and the rule of “male domination and female subordination”. Accordingly, things concerning women, such as bound feet, arranged marriage, child brides and deprivation of women’s right to education, were criticized as

¹⁰⁰Zhu Dake, *Cultural Criticism: Theory and Practice of Cultural Philosophy* (Suzhou: Guwuxuan Publishing House, 2011), pp. 230–231.

¹⁰¹Bulliet, Richard W., *The Columbia History of the Twentieth Century* (Nanjing: Jiangsu People’s Publishing House), p. 70.

¹⁰²Wang Zheng, “Gender and China’s Modernity”, *Wenhuibao (Wenhui News)*, 12 January 2003.

“cannibalistic” Confucian rules, so that the Confucian traditions were fully destroyed. The discussion of women issue indeed exposed the gender discrimination and the women-fettering evils in the Chinese society. But the educated men-led discussion was defective as well: Male elites looked down upon women as a poorly-bred group and seen them as the victims of feudal ethics, so that women’s contributions in the 5000-year history of China were easily denied. The discussion thus took an ahistorical attitude toward women.¹⁰³

Revolution dominated the Chinese society from the May Fourth Movement onwards. Kuomintang and the Communist Party of China made the First KMT-CPC Cooperation during the First Revolutionary Civil War (1924–1927) when feminist topics were put forth to attract women to the revolution. However, independent feminist organizations got excluded, so that the women’s organizations and activities not engaged in the revolution were defined as something of narrow-minded capitalist feminism. With some political campaigns and manipulations, the term “women’s rights” was given a derogatory meaning in modern China. During the Mao-era, the women’s liberation movement and the mainstream gender discourse actually carried forward what the feminist topics did after the May Fourth Movement. Many “new women” who used to be active in the feminist movement around the May Fourth Movement later became the major driving force of women’s liberation in the early days of the People’s Republic of China.¹⁰⁴ China saw enormous advances in legal and social issues concerning women’s liberation between the 1950s and 70s. As Article Six of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China stipulated, “Feudal codes that fetter women are cancelled. Women enjoy equal rights as men do in politics, economy, culture, education and social life. Free marriage is encouraged.” The marriage law enforced later prohibited bigamy, concubines and child brides and guaranteed the freedom of marriage and divorce. Widows were allowed to remarry. Men and women also began to enjoy equal rights in land allocation. Women in cities received vocational training and worked in various areas that used to keep closed to them. Women in rural areas were included into collective activities of production. However, the feminist movement met with setbacks between the late 1950s and the early 1960s when the economic crisis hit China. Leaders of women’s liberation were asked to keep silent or told to admit that it was not the right time for their liberation.¹⁰⁵ The women’s liberation lapsed into silence in China.

The women issue was mentioned again first in literature in the middle 1980s and soon developed into a sociological discussion.¹⁰⁶ The concept of “feminist

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Wang Zheng, “Gender and China’s Modernity”, *Wenhuibao (Wenhui News)*, 12 January 2003.

¹⁰⁵Rosenberg, Rosalind, “The Woman Question” in Bulliet, *The Columbia History of the Twentieth Century* (Nanjing: Jiangsu People’s Publishing House), pp. 78–80.

¹⁰⁶Li Xiaojiang, “Working Women in Contemporary Women’s Literature”, *Literature and Art Criticism*, 1987 (1).

literature” or “women’s literature” first emerged in the 1920s and 30s. However, it hadn’t been taken as something clearly-defined and controversial until the period between 1984 and 1988. It was the first time since 1949 that scholars in the Chinese mainland tried to analyze the relationship between women and literature from the angle of gender differences, aiming to sort out the gender definition and its practice in the women’s liberation between 1950s and 1970s. Many critics hold that women fully enjoyed during that period equal political and social rights as men did and lived as equal-to-men subjects of the nation-state. However, gender differences and feminist discourse got suppressed culturally, as women were playing their part as someone no different from men. Women lived in an “asexual” way, historically and culturally, without any proper cultural expressions for their own existence or state of mind. Against this background, “feminist literature” separated “women” from the idea of “men and women are totally the same” for the first time. It tried to justify gender differences in culture.¹⁰⁷

Due to some historical reasons, Marxist humanitarianism and the Western humanitarian theory of the 19th century became the dominant thoughts in the new enlightenment movement in the social/cultural transition in the early 1980s when scholars made a review of the period between 1950s and 70s. The liberation of “human nature” stood as an important indicator, attaching great significance to individual values and diversities. It is interesting that “gender” in China in the 1980s became a major cognitive pattern of “human nature”, as a backwash to the “class” discourse.¹⁰⁸ According to the academic views, women did gain a social status equal to men’s, thanks to socialist revolutions; nonetheless, they have yet gained any self-awareness. The women’s liberation in China was always passively pushed forward, thus an accessory to men, nation-state and class liberation. Therefore, a revolution was needed, culturally and mentally, to wake up women’s self-awareness.

Humanitarian discourse well prepared for the separation of individuals from the unified discourse of the nation-state. However, the topic remained as “gender equality”; that is, to discuss differences in “human nature” based on abstract Utopian concept of “human”. In this theory, gender differences were basically described as those in “human nature” generated from different “natural” factors such as physiological and psychological elements, while other factors behind “human nature”, like power and hierarchical relationships, were ignored. Therefore, feminist theory in 1980s in China was quite different from that of the 1960s in Europe and the U.S. Feminist theory in China targeted the nation-state’s mainstream “class” discourse rather than the discourse of patriarchal power. “Feminist literature” was thought to be a good supplement to diversities of “human”, instead

¹⁰⁷He Guimei, “A Brief History of Contemporary Feminist Literature Criticism”, *Journal of PLA Academy of Art*, 2009 (2).

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

of a doubt to the gender relationship or cultural order. Therefore, the idea of “feminist literature” seemed to be very mild and confined within the existing cultural order.¹⁰⁹

China embraced the first climax in feminist theory and criticism in the late 1980s, while the Western theories of women’s rights/feminism introduced into China accelerated, to some extent, the separation of the criticism of feminist literature in China from the new enlightenment discourse into a distinctive expression system and discourse. Western works on women’s rights/feminism were translated and published in China in the middle and late 1980s, as a part of “the fever of the Western learning” after the reform and opening-up. However, the Western theories of women’s rights/feminism were translated and introduced with prudence. Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* was the first to be translated among the four important works in the second wave of the Western feminist movement. It is this book that reveals to the then Chinese critics that “a woman is more to be formed than ‘born’”. Another book translated into Chinese in early days is *The Feminine Mystique* authored by Betty Friedan. However, the book drew little attention in China, as Chinese and American societies were too different. Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* produced quite an effect in China when it was translated into Chinese in 1989, as the essay initiates women’s economic and cultural independence. However, it is quite interesting that Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics*, which is most closely related to literature and literary criticism, hadn’t been translated into Chinese until 1999, as it was hardly accepted by Chinese critics in the 1980s for its acute and sharp attacks on patriarchy and its inclusion of male/female relation into “politics”. It appeared to be too radical to be accepted by Chinese critics who strived for “gender harmony”. American and British works on feminism were translated and introduced in a large number at the time, while little attention was paid to women’s rights/feminist theory in France. Linguistic transition was far from being completed among Chinese critics in the 1980s and the mainstream literary criticism remained empirical and positivistic. Thus, post-structuralist critical theory of feminism, which takes (post) structuralism, psychoanalysis and deconstruction as its underlying theories and dialog objects, produced little impacts on Chinese critics of feminist literature between the late 1980s and the early 1990s. In their discussion of “feminist literature”, scholars looked for distinctive features of females from women’s experience, instead of doubting the authentic and essentialist idea of gender.¹¹⁰

“Patriarchy” first drew attention from the Chinese academic circles in the late 1980s.¹¹¹ This concept may remind people that “human” or “human nature” used in the new enlightenment discourse is something of patriarchy. *Emerging from the*

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹See Sun Shaoxian, *Feminist Literature*, Shenyang: Liaoning University Publishing House, 1987. The author is the first scholar who places women’s issues in the unfair gender relations under patriarchy.

Horizon of History: Modern Chinese Women's Literature co-authored by Dai Jinhua and Meng Yue (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Publishing House, 1989) produces the biggest effect in the field. The authors make in "Introduction" an analysis of the power structure in the traditional social framework in ancient China, stating that "the female" as the ruled gender lay as the secret of that social order. That is, "the patriarchal order was established on the base of a complete system guarding off the female as the alienated adversary, so that it would be a secret forever that the female was enslaved in a male-dominant society". The authors reinterpret the 2000-year history of ancient China and give their understanding of the 20th-century Chinese society: Women in China never got freed from a miserable fate as "an empty signifier". As the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, Chinese women "at last finished a rather ironical cycle that started with fighting against their set gender role in a male-dominant society and ended with accepting their new asexual role in the society".¹¹² This conclusion goes well beyond the new enlightenment interpretation to history, human nature and human in the 1980s and is radical as never before.

In the early and middle 1990s, feminist thoughts in China went beyond literature into wider social and cultural fields and drew much attention, which has been usually attributed to the Fourth World Conference on Women held in 1995 in Beijing. Thanks to this conference, female writers' works were published in a large number. The conference was widely covered by newspapers, periodicals and TV programs, so that the entire society paid much attention to women's issues. But mass culture that boosted by market forces in the 1990s may play a more important role here. Mass culture essentially represents people's daily life and is usually eager for sex/gender and sexual love/love topics. Female authors were seen as an object and the other to be observed around 1995 when series of their books were published in a particular way of operation, design and marketing, to cater to mass culture's imagined definition and preferred way of consumption of "women". Or rather to say, gender issues were raised by market forces, instead of being purposely put forth by feminists. Confronted with the challenges imposed by mass culture, some feminist critical thoughts, methods and standpoints merge with the discussion and studies of mass culture and become an integral part of Cultural Studies in modern China.

2. Feminism and Four Gender Issues

(I) Gender and Class in "Personal Writing"

In women's writing in the 1990s, the most eye-catching subfield may be "personal writing" or "private writing". The female writers of the late 1980s, such as Chen Ran, Lin Bai, Xu Xiaobin and Hainan, were usually known as writers of "avant-garde fictions", while their autobiographical fictions focusing on their own personal experiences were seen as representative ones of "personal writing" around 1995. A protagonist's personal experiences are placed in a closed private space in

¹¹²Ibid.

such a fiction, such as her family or the bedroom of a woman living alone, or about her sexual life. In such a closed space, gender is the most important and even the only identity of the protagonist. The heroines' personal experiences, those of their bodies in particular, served, in a sense, as the background and imaginary space of the discussion of women's writing in the 1990s.¹¹³

Scholars and writers in the Chinese mainland make little theoretical interpretation to "personal writing". Two representative female writers make some important and positive comments. Chen Ran writes on Internet, "My body is my only language" and "What's personal is what's human", or "I'd like to stand alone in a corner and observe and feel the world of individuals. That's personal writing or private writing". Lin Bai states in *Fragments in the Air*, a narrative of her writing, "Personal writing is a true surge of life and a flight and leap of personal emotions and senses, memories and imaginations and mind and body. The true human nature feels liberated as never before in this flight."¹¹⁴

According to Cheng Lirong, the statements of "personal writing" made by Lin Bai and Chen Ran are vividly imprinted with the "body writing" theories of the West (see Chap. 6 for a detailed discussion). Lin Bai and other female writers are cautious about the erotic elements in "body writing" and replace it with "personal writing" or "private writing". "Personal writing" is indeed different from "body writing" in the West. Cheng provides a brief review of the body writing in the traditional Chinese literature, including boudoir repining in the ancient Chinese literary works and "autobiographical" fictions written by Yu Dafu and Guo Moruo and other rebel-writers from the May Fourth Movement onwards. In the new era in particular, Zhang Jie and some others shift their attention from the relationship between women and the external world to women's inner strength (particularly the power of conquering hidden in women). Cheng Lirong holds that in the actual context in China, "personal writing" shows how the "marginalized" discourse has dashed to the center. People find traces of "personal writing" of the 1980s and 90s in Shu Ting's poems, in new realistic and avant-garde fictions and in Wang Shuo's novels. "Personal writing" is an integral part of the literary trend that lifted the restraints on literature as "something to cultivate" and something political.¹¹⁵

In He Guimei's eyes, "personal writing" has meanings quite different from those behind the enlightenment literature in the 1980s. The mainstream discourse that dominated the 1980s, such as new enlightenment and its idea of modernization, was widely doubted in the 1990s. "The personal is political", a rallying slogan of the feminist movement in the 1960s in the West broke up the wall between private realm and public space and pushed women's personal experiences into the political and social spheres. "Personal writing", to the contrary, strived to redraw a boundary

¹¹³He Guimei, "A Brief History of Contemporary Feminist Literature Criticism", *Journal of PLA Academy of Art*, 2009 (2).

¹¹⁴Quoted from Cheng Lirong, "The Western Feminist Theory of "Body Writing" and Its Situation in China", *Journal of Southwest China Normal University*, 2003 (4).

¹¹⁵Ibid.

between private realm and public space and justify women's experiences by pulling them back to "private" sphere. That was an involuntary evasion from the public life after having had traumatic collective experiences. Moreover, there were both an opposition between the individual and the public and a connection between "individuals" and "women". When women's issues are justified and placed in the private realm, feminist literature has different political significances.¹¹⁶

Zhao Xifang holds a negative view on the personal writing by Chen Ran, Lin Bai and others, thinking that "the feminist consciousness (expressed in those fictions) is nothing more than women's narcissism and self-consoling and their hatred to men. The descriptions of women's secret experience and feelings may be the pure feminist consciousness. However, we may find no such a woman entirely detaching herself from the society. If there's any, that woman never comes to her self-awareness; instead, she merely alienates herself from the others."¹¹⁷

Scholars like He Guimei and Wang Xiaoming also see "personal writing" as a middle-class thing. According to Wang Xiaoming, what feminist critics called women's "liberation" in the early and middle 1990s in China, was never a thing for all the women in the country. Instead, it was something for the "well-off" women at the time who had ample time for and interest in studying gender issues.¹¹⁸ In He Guimei's opinion, in 1990s China, the more radical an opinion of gender issues was, the more conservative it went concerning class/stratum. To a large extent, feminist literature gained a momentum in market and stirred a surge in society, as "personal writing" constructed and conceived a space for private life, without opening up a new horizon for the truly rebellious women. Instead, "personal writing" unintentionally played a role in constructing a new middle class-based mainstream order in China in the 1990s. The descriptions of women's experiences didn't overthrow the existing gender order. Rather, it turned to be a feminist, personal and middle-class (or rather to say "fashion") show. Thus, it was easy to see "Red Poppies" series with authors' photos and works finally evolve into Wei Hui's novels purely written about physical pleasures.¹¹⁹ In this way, "personal writing" and "body writing" became an integral part of the middle-class consumption culture, thus was greatly conservative. It is of enormous practical and theoretical significance to take gender and class identity into consideration in cultural analysis.

(II) Women's Images in Mass Media and the Study of Gender Discourse

Cultural Studies distinguishes itself from the traditional literary study by expanding its horizon from literary classics to mass culture and from literary texts to mass

¹¹⁶He Guimei, "A Brief History of Contemporary Feminist Literature Criticism", *Journal of PLA Academy of Art*, 2009 (2).

¹¹⁷Zhao Xifang, "Feminism in Dilemma in China", *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 2001 (4).

¹¹⁸Wang Xiaoming and Xue Yi et al., "Women of the 1990s: Personal Writing", *Literary Review*, 1999 (5).

¹¹⁹He Guimei, "A Brief History of Contemporary Feminist Literature Criticism", *Journal of PLA Academy of Art*, 2009 (2).

media. Feminist literature criticism in China has focused on the analysis of women's images in literary works, while Cultural Studies extends the study of women's images into mass media.

Tao Dongfeng analyzes the power relation between men and women from a feminist angle of view when he sees into advertising culture. Through case studies, Tao concludes that relationship between men and women and that between social roles in an advertisement are usually greatly stereotyped. Advertisements are filled with unequal power relations. For example, men usually enjoy things concerning women from an observer's position (women are evaluated by men and do nothing except to try to please the others or to be enjoyed and evaluated). One finds various lies and fairy tales about "a happy life" (like the pattern in which men earn the bread and women take care of the house). Such lies and fairy tales in advertisements actually satisfy, reproduce and reinforce some outworn ideas and unequal power relations.¹²⁰

Films and TV dramas make a major part of mass culture. Some investigate women's images in three types of costume dramas, namely time-travel dramas, "new-type" harem shows and costume romances. The authors see modern feminist ideas and subjectivity in the TV dramas, the production team, protagonists and audience of which are mostly women,¹²¹ and feel quite optimistic about feminist consciousness in TV dramas in present-day China. Zhang Bingjuan makes an in-depth analysis, in her doctoral dissertation, of the relationship between narrative and gender in three types of TV drama texts, namely historical plays, love dramas and family plays. She finds that a historical play in the Chinese TV culture is usually a resource shared by acts of state, market forces and intellectuals and told in a way interweaving "legendary narrative", "national narrative" and "legend of heroes", saturated with male-dominant perception and prejudice that conceal the truth of women in history. Women are mostly protagonists of love dramas and crystallize the true, the good and the beautiful. They are selfless, dedicated and willing to sacrifice themselves. However, men cover up their negation of women's life, emotions and desires by sacrificing women's happiness and calling for their agreement. In her analysis of a family play, the author explores the changes of views of marriage and love by men and women, as well as some difficulties women face (e.g. domestic violence).¹²²

Dr. Zhang Chenyang makes a comprehensive survey of a larger scale by sampling newspapers and periodicals, films and TV dramas and online media of the period between 1995 and 2005 and conducting a quantitative and qualitative research of the gender discourse issues within. She takes dozens of samples from three types of newspapers, namely mainstream organs of the Party, evening papers

¹²⁰Tao Dongfeng, "A Cultural Interpretation to Advertisements", *Journal of Capital Normal University* (Social Sciences Edition), 2001 (6), p. 72.

¹²¹Ma Shaopei & Bai Shaonan, "The Study of TV Culture from a Feminist Angle of View: A Case Study of Popular Costume Dramas", *Shenzhen (Divine Land)*, 2012 (20).

¹²²Zhang Bingjuan, "TV Dramas: Narrative and Gender", a doctoral dissertation, Zhengzhou University, 2004.

and consumption-related papers and finds in them great disparities in topics, gender discourse and ideas of consumption. Because of market forces and globalization, newspapers have since the middle and late 1990s been subject to social, political and economic structures and under the impacts of the traditional cultural mentality and produced a complicated scene of gender: Women are commercialized in the call for a modern idea of gender and their living conditions get ignored when the government enhances its public policy for women.¹²³

Zhang makes her survey concerning three women's periodicals, namely a government-run one, a government-commercial one and a commercial one with foreign investment. In her research, Zhang finds low "sexism" in women's periodicals in modern China, despite varying and ambiguous values, though. The government-run periodical tries to get closer to readers, under the pressure of market forces, but it never abandons the gender values focusing on the development of the nation and women. The commercial periodical does nothing more than to serve as a link between its female readers and "consumption", allegedly leading women to the realm of "freedom" and "liberation". Such a periodical interweaves women's liberal idea of gender with a materialized image of women trumpeted in the fairy tale of money.

Zhang Chenyang finds that female characters in mainstream films are largely in a "no-self" status: They either devote themselves to male figures involved in revolution or affiliate themselves to the discourse of the national liberation. In a commercial film, female roles are represented as icons of "tradition", "temptress" or "the hopeless", demonstrating the true conditions women are facing in a modern society, to some extent. In a more affectionate ethical film, the heroine is extolled as "a mother", suppressed as "an individual" and ignored as "a citizen". Thus, even though the discourse of women's independence is encouraged, such a film remains obsessed with the stereotyped image of mother in the traditional gender discourse. In general, we cannot simply say that "sexism" dominates Chinese films. The national discourse, artistic pursuit, feminist perspective and traditional patriarchal culture have different shares in various film genres and play a decisive role in the features and trends of feminist discourse and gender discourse.

Zhang investigates TV dramas such as those that tell stories about common people and those that are starred with "idols" and sees in them an open, multi-faceted and "ambiguous" gender discourse. That's a game between gender reflection, commercial force, modern imagination and traditional rules.

Dr. Zhang Chenyang's study may be further enhanced in terms of the number, representativeness and category of picked samples. Nevertheless, with her detailed empirical research, Zhang well illustrates the complicated gender issues in mass media in modern China and makes a preliminary study of the game between commercial, political and traditional cultural powers behind all those intertwined discourses. Such a study is thus of great values.

¹²³Zhang Chenyang, "From Utopia to Daily Life", a doctoral dissertation, Fudan University, 2006.

(III) Gender and the Study of City Culture

Urban landscapes and mentalities of urban dwellers in Chinese cities have experienced profound changes since the 1990s when consumption culture began to fast develop and grow. Scholars in Shanghai, in particular, pay more attention to and study more about the city culture of Old Shanghai (particularly Shanghai-style literature) as a representative of the modern Chinese culture, trying to revive their memories of the First Metropolis in the Far East and “integrate with the world” as soon as possible. The study takes urban space, fashion and mass culture as its objects and adopts methods of interdisciplinary and border study, with distinctive features of Cultural Studies. “Gender and Shanghai’s city culture” is a hot topic, attracting numerous female scholars. Some male scholars (such as Li Oufan, Zhang Yingjin and Sun Shaoyi) are also involved and do brilliant works in this field.

Conspicuous consumption in modern Shanghai and its impacts on the citizens’ social life and psychology are well discussed in Yue Zheng’s “Psychology of Modern Shanghainese”, Xin Ping’s “Digging History in Shanghai” and Li Changli’s “The Chinese Lifestyle: from the Traditional to the Modern”. Lian Lingling in her “Women’s Consumption and Female Consumers” and Chen Huifen in her “‘Universal Department Store’, ‘Modern Girls’ and a Modern-looking Shanghai” see into the relationship between women and department stores in Shanghai and discuss various changes Shanghai has experienced in its urban space, visual system and class/gender reorganization. According to Chen, the four department stores in Old Shanghai created a new urban space for women who used to be confined within home, so that it was justified to have women conduct their activities in the urban space. Department stores were also an icon of fashion and modern girls, a new type of women who could gain their individual identities and opportunities via the polished appearance. Thus, the traditional hierarchical system was overthrown and individual identities “reconstructed” and the mobility of social strata boosted. The fashion represented by modern girls helped form the idea of linear modern advancement, during which process the image of male elites in cities turned “westernized” to the extremes, while westernized modern girls stirred a social anxiety. Modern women were severely attacked in the campaign of “the Year of the Chinese Products” and accused of “turning traitors to their country”. In the New Life Movement later, their clothes were under the national surveillance.¹²⁴ Chen actually makes a reflection on women’s role and the price they’ve paid in the modernization process in China.

The gender perspective is also adopted in the mass culture production in modern Shanghai. The women’s images on calendars and magazine covers remind people that women have been an integral part of the modern imagination in China. Women’s images in films, as well as actresses’ personalities, performance and “intersubjectivity”, co-formed cinema, a new public sphere in China. The characters they played in films were usually “freshmen in society”, while actresses themselves

¹²⁴Chen Huifen, “A Gender Perspective and the Study of City Culture of Shanghai”, *Social Sciences*, 2012 (9).

in the actual life played the same part from their career options to lifestyle. Thus, they easily tended to be the foci of conflicts and negotiations between the Chinese and Western and new and old cultures in modern Shanghai. Modernization in Shanghai has been pushed forward by material advances and cultural negotiations and debates that found a “proper” arena in film actresses’ living conditions.¹²⁵

Zhu Dake tries to interpret Shanghai’s city culture from an unusual angle, i.e. the relationship between urban architecture and gender. He sees Shanghai as a woman and a woman’s buttock if we have a drawing of sensual desires of China. The Bund is then the woman’s vulva, Nanjing Road her vagina and Huaihai Road and Hengshan Road her breasts. According to Zhu, femininity has historically dominated the Yangtze River Delta where feminine sensual desires have been the commoners’ spiritual torch in modern times. Numerous male writers of Shanghai-style literature babbled about sensual desires in Old Shanghai. However, Eileen Chang was the only ambassador of Shanghai-style sensual desires. Courtesans such as Liu Rushi, Dong Xiaowan and Sai Jinhua living in Shanghai were even seen as national heroines sacrificing their own bodies. Sensual desires got to be oppressed in Shanghai when the People’s Republic of China was founded. Wei Hui and some others write about women’s desires in a bald way in the new era, marking the revival and growth of the sensual culture popular in medieval and modern Shanghai. In the meantime, the national discourse has turned from politics to sensual desires in a context interwoven with the domestic politics, international capital, consumption of modern fashion and mass communication. In Zhu’s opinion, however, the call of sensual desires is nothing more than an affected lie of the city.¹²⁶ He points in another article that the map of desires and s-zone in Shanghai are tightly tied up with the power of state and the city’s new sensual desires are under a high control.¹²⁷

Zhu Dake concluded in 2003 that Shanghai was undergoing a sex reassignment surgery and turning from a feminine city to a masculine one. The political connotation of the urban landscape changed with fast-growing skyscrapers, so that the entire city gave out a strong masculine smell of capital.¹²⁸ However, feminist critics feel angry at Zhu Dake and his comments on Shanghai’s femininity and female writers (such as Wei Hui). They see in Zhu’s comments “a shaping misogynistic reading pattern”, i.e. an attempt to continuously and methodologically abase the value of feminine texts and criminalize feminine writing by making use of all sorts of patriarchal ideologies and political and cultural capitals (such as various nationalist thought, sex/gender discrimination, exploitation, oppression and class antagonism). According to those female critics, “in the map of sensual desires of

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶Zhu Dake, “Shanghai: the Scream of Sensual Desires”, *Twenty-First Century* (Hong Kong, 2001).

¹²⁷Zhu Dake, “Map of Desires and S-zone in Shanghai”, *Southern Metropolis Daily*, 10 April 2002.

¹²⁸Zhu Dake, “Phallic Politics in Skyscrapers”, *South Reviews*, 2003 (8).

Shanghai (drawn by Zhu Dake), the female body seems to be merged into the metropolis. The comments are expanded from Shanghai women's sensual desires to those of Shanghai and finally to 'sensual desires of China'. In this way, male critics easily attack at first Shanghai women's making up to Western men and then criticize Shanghai and even China's yielding to selling their souls to the post-colonial global capital market, in an assumed way in those male critics' imagination."¹²⁹ Then why did Zhu Dake illustrate Shanghai as a sexy woman? And he is never the only one to do so (another critic making similar comments is Zhang Xudong). In the opinions of the aforementioned female critics, some male intellectuals have fallen into a mindset to compare the relationship between the development of a Third World metropolis (nation state) and the global capitalist powers to commodity-like women and gender relations. Male Chinese intellectuals find a secured standpoint of ethics in the image of "prostitutes" that symbolizes betrayal, pure pursuit of profits, wandering life and poverty, to criticize the corrupt and wicked state power and global capitalism. Those male intellectuals further justify their own discursive power and show off their masculinity by criticizing the image of "prostitutes", even though those men are themselves, to some extent, "prostitutes" without dignity who serve the state machine. Women in the Third World countries have been persecuted by patriarchy and imperialism. They are transferred like a gift and have to suffer unfair attacks. Zhu Dake's criticism of women that is based on the female body leads merely to more merciless oppression of the female body/feminine text.

(IV) Gender Identity

Despite the harsh rules for gender identity in the mainstream culture in China, transgenderism has long been in existence in alternative cultures since ancient days. According to Zhu Dake, "male scholars in ancient China liked to act like women". A huge number of poems of the Song Dynasty are in the feminine discourse in a male-dominant culture. Transgenderism in ancient China reached its zenith in *Kunqu* opera. Dramas in Shaoxing opera glorify the aesthetics in lesbianism. Women like Hua Mulan couldn't gain a social status or realize their values unless they disguised themselves as men.¹³⁰

"Super Voice Girls", a singing contest held in 2005 aroused people's awareness and discussion of gender identity in modern China. Winning singers in this Hunan TV-sponsored show, including Li Yuchun, Zhou Bichang, Zhang Liangying and He Jie, looked "defeminized" or "asexual". Li Yuchun the champion selected by the audience via SMS votes, in particular, looked even more "masculine" than the others. Emerging from the hot program, Li has been warmly received and imitated by her fans. The sharp contrast between the image of modern women represented

¹²⁹He Weiwen & Yang Ling, "A Misinterpretation and Absurd Deduction of Women: To Mr. Zhu Dake", *Research of Chinese Literature*, 2007 (3).

¹³⁰Zhu Dake, *Cultural Criticism: Theory and Practice of Cultural Philosophy* (Suzhou: Guwuxuan Publishing House, 2011), p. 242.

by Li Yuchun and that of traditional women thrust the issue of “asexuality” into the domain of public discourse.

Chinese educators largely see asexuality as a problem that needs a solution and call for efforts to strengthen gender identity education.¹³¹ However, there is no shortage of more positive opinions on the issue. Many see Li Yuchun’s win in the contest as a victory for feminism. According to He Ping and Wu Feng, “Super Voice Girls” successfully upends against traditional gender politics. Both male, the two point out that Li Yuchun’s winning overturns “the aesthetic criteria and purport for the female body set by men”, “fully demonstrating women’s will”, thus is “a victory of new feminism”.¹³² Liu Zhenzhen finds in a sociological sampling survey that as many as 80.0% of the male participants describe the image of an ideal woman as “being pretty and sexy” and “sweet”, while 59.2% of the female participants hope that they become “independent women”. The result indicates a strong consciousness of subjectivity of modern women. Majority of Li Yuchun’s fans are female. The females show a much higher acceptance and recognition of Li Yuchun than the males do (as of 89.6 vs. 36.0%), while the ratio of women who don’t accept Li is much lower than that of men (as of 4.8 vs. 61.0%).¹³³ This is a solid piece of evidence in sociology that Li Yuchun and her popularity are indeed a victory of women over men.

The sociologist Li Yinhe considers “Super Voice Girls” as a “transgenderist” victory. A pop star with a somehow blurred gender identity helps ease the oppression imposed on both men and women by the established gender criteria and reduces the pressure of men and women striving to demonstrate their “gender identities”. Such a pop star is thus easily accepted and appreciated by men and women. Li elaborates on the issue further from a feminist perspective that any social group is entitled to their own recognized criteria of beauty; however, they have no right to force the other groups to accept those criteria. In many cases, men have the single say to the criteria for beauty of women and that is likely to hurt women. Nevertheless, Li Yinhe stresses little “feminism”; instead, she appreciates diversity and individuality.¹³⁴

Zhu Dake thinks highly about “Super Voice Girls” as the debut of a gender revolution. In this contest, female singers followed their own will and ignored the

¹³¹Hua Hua, “Formation and Causes of Unisex in Gender Identity”, *Shanghai Research on Education*, 2006 (12). Wang Zhiqian quotes in “From Jia Baoyu to Li Yuchun: A Survey of the Unisex Youth” (*Middle School Students*, 2007 [3]) the opinions of Yue Shanyao, Director of Research and Guidance Center for Family Education of Shanghai Academy of Educational Sciences, and Zhang Deming, Director of Shanghai Education Television, both of whom hold a negative view on the unisex trend in gender identity. According to Yue and Zhang, boys and girls should behave what they should be.

¹³²He Ping & Wu Feng, “‘Super Voice Girls’ and Gender Politics: A Perspective of Western Marxist Feminism”, *Nankai Journal*, 2005 (5).

¹³³Liu Zhenzhen, “Shaping and Spread of the New Image of Women: the Image of Women Represented by Li Yuchun and the Media’s Role”, *Ethnic Arts Quarterly*, 2006 (2).

¹³⁴Li Yinhe, “‘Super Voice Girls’ as a ‘Transgenderist’ Victory”, *Nanfang Zhoumo (South Weekend)*, 25 August 2005.

opinions of the male audience who only appreciated women's appearance. The program attracted an overwhelming majority of female audience to the live show, as it totally ignored gender identity (neutral-looking candidates were more popular) and appearance (pretty girls were as possibly sifted out). Voice was placed over appearance. Women who tried to win the audience with appearance were defeated entirely in the program. In a male-dominant society, men see women as beauties, sexual objects, super housekeepers, great mothers and devoted wives, but never as women themselves. Women finally see what they truly are in "Super Voice Girls". In a new world with a blurred gender identity, individuals could be what they would like to be, thanks to diversified possibilities. It is good news for both men and women. "Super Voice Girls" started a gender revolution.¹³⁵

Xiao Ying looks at the issue of gender-neutral appearance in "Super Voice Girls" from the angle of youth consumption culture and explains the interwoven resistance and merging between commercial trends and youth subculture. Two attitudes toward gender are prevalent in modern societies, namely strengthened perceptual sexual features and diminished cultural meanings of sex. The former is a "flirting" culture that dominates and is a favorite to commercial activities, so that "the image of sexy youth" permeates the society. However, modern consumers tend to push away anything commonly seen; therefore, the "flirting" culture is somehow rejected in the modern consumption psychology and "a more unaffected style of youth" is preferred. That's "an asexual style of youth", the transgenderist way of which subverts the traditional criteria for gender. Nevertheless, Xiao also points out that this subversion is generated from the consumption of "sex" in modern aesthetics of youth. "The asexual style of youth" is a practice of consumerist cultural strategy, i.e. the "de-gendered" cultural production and consumption to "re-gender". In another word, "to be asexual" is a "show of sex that covers up the true sex".¹³⁶

Liu Zhenzhen tries to understand the spread of the new image of women in media economy. According to Liu, commercial media have to cater to the general public, masses who are so various in their likes and dislikes. Li Yuchun has evidently won quite a number of the audience. Media had to make a response to the phenomenon. Thus, media played a role in spreading the preference of Li Yuchun's fans and further exerted an influence on the others. Liu suggests that the market force in mass media in China pushes the masses used to be under the same ideological pattern to different directions in their likes and dislikes. That is a structural reason why a new image of women emerged.¹³⁷

Similar to Li Yuchun, some popular actors, such as Xiaoshenyang and Li Yugang, are known for their neutral-looking performance. Li Yugang is recognized as an inheritor and reformer of the female impersonator role, a traditional type of

¹³⁵Zhu Dake, *Cultural Criticism: Theory and Practice of Cultural Philosophy* (Suzhou: Guwuxuan Publishing House, 2011), pp. 235–236.

¹³⁶Xiao Ying, "Aesthetics of Youth: Consumption of 'Youth' in the E-time", *Journal of Renmin University of China*, 2006 (4).

¹³⁷Liu Zhenzhen, "Shaping and Spread of the New Image of Women: the Image of Women Represented by Li Yuchun and the Media's Role", *Ethnic Arts Quarterly*, 2006 (2).

roles in *Kunqu* and Peking operas.¹³⁸ Xiaoshen yang is popular with audience for his feminine-looking shows, which cannot be explained with traditions in Peking opera. According to Li Shengtao, Xiaoshen yang satisfies aesthetic needs of different audience groups with his androgynous-looking stage image: Men feel self-confident in his femininity and feminists see the “victory” of feminist culture in modern days in his “feminized” image, while “queers” in modern societies feel a sense of belonging in him. Li thinks that Xiaoshen yang is in vogue, thanks to the comic-like impulsive, vulgar and shallow cultural personality in the current social conditions.¹³⁹

Zhu Dongli analyzes Xiaoshen yang’s success from the angle of the current social structure. He attributes the irony culture in modern China to the Cultural Revolution. All the serious dramas finally retreated from the stage when enlightenment suffered setbacks in the late 1980s and market forces began to get the upper hand in the 1990s. From then on, ironic comedy has permeated the entire society. However, irony gradually lost its challenging power over ideology and fell back to its original grassroots role of “clown”, from Wang Shuo and Ge You to Zhao Benshan and finally to Xiaoshen yang. Xiaoshen yang the feminine-looking actor is a symbol of gender “degradation” and succumbing and an “ambassador” of the enormous grassroots masses hired and debased by the mainstream from the 1990s. “Those who live at the bottom of society have no say. If they want to be heard, they are only allowed to act in Xiaoshen yang’s oppressed and distorted way. That may be the only way the mainstream would be willing to hear what the bottom say. Xiaoshen yang’s signature word ‘Hng...Ang...’ is actually the emasculated voice of the bottom. He tries to amuse the audience by abandoning his own dignity. Some may feel uncomfortable and even pained, while others are amused. Xiaoshen yang belittles himself in his performance of low comedy. Technically, it has something bold and straightforward unique to Northeast China. Significantly, it reveals the changes in the structure of modern society. Xiaoshen yang goes far beyond the limits any others in cultural or showbiz circles would ever withstand. He has in him the strength well beyond conventional and mainstream powers.” However, he produces the extraordinary effect not only from his own performance accomplishment, but also from the current social structure. When he imitates singers in vogue and “sings heartily, pent-up grievances are poured out and the inner hurt is soothed. Then an amusing comedy turns into a tragic tune. That self-belittled clown

¹³⁸See Deng Qibin, “On the Inheritance and Development of Li Yugang’s Performance as a Female Impersonator”, *Literature & Art Studies*, 2012 (3); Cang Miao, “An Analysis of Female Impersonators of the Mei’s School in Modern-day Peking Opera”, *Journal of Liaocheng University*, 2011 (2); Li Jiegang, “The Unsurpassed Beauty of the East: How Li Yugang Has Succeeded as a Female Impersonator”, *Journal of Heilongjiang Vocational Institute of Ecological Engineering*, 2011 (3); and Gao Miaomiao & Dai Jingwei, “When Peking Opera Meets Modern Music: Li Yugang’s Exploration of Peking Opera”, *Keji Xinxi (Sciences and Information)*, 2013 (9).

¹³⁹Li Shengtao, “Xiaoshen yang the Man with Cash: An Ambiguous Cultural Icon”, *Eastern Forum*, 2010 (2).

looks not that ugly as before.” In a word, Xiaoshen yang belittles himself in his transgender performance and tells the audience that those in his stratum have no other choices than to have their voices heard in an excessive comic manner.¹⁴⁰ It is valuable to place Cultural Studies into the social and historical contexts specific to China.

3. Gender Studies and the Chinese Context

Similar to other topics in Cultural Studies in modern China, gender theories (feminism and homosexuality) in the Chinese academic circles have been mostly imported from the West, so that it is open to discussion whether those Western theories are applicable to the Chinese context.

Cui Weiping dislikes the dogmatic feminist criticism in the name of “-ism”: “It claims to see and understand this world in a truly objective way. Nevertheless, it usually kills that claimed understanding well before it started the cognitive activities, as its conclusion has long been prepared and placed.”¹⁴¹ Cui questions the conclusion feminists have widely accepted that gender equality between the 1950s and 70s was actually a suppression of women by removing gender differences, as according to her, such a conclusion implies that the suppression of women was from men or that men were free from any suppression generated by the removed gender differences. In Cui’s opinion, during that process, men fell into victims as well. Both men and women were suppressed and without any gender features. Therefore, she suggests that the strangler of Chinese women may be some ideological power, instead of men or phallocentrism.¹⁴²

Zhao Xifang elaborates on the issue that Chinese men never enjoy any subjectivity. According to him, individuality is a modern discourse unique to the West, while the Chinese history and culture has distinguished itself with collectivism. Thus in China, neither men nor women have ever enjoyed any “subjectivity” in the Western sense. Thanks to the traditional love for individuality, Western feminism pursues the independence of women beyond the male dominance. However, feminism in China is closely connected to the nation, country and class, without any protest against the male dominance. Zhao feels no regret about this, though. According to him, to judge the situation of Chinese women with the individualist feminist criticism of the West, leads to the conclusion that the awakening of Chinese women around the May Fourth Movement was only inferior to the nation-state thought (see the ideas of Dai Jinhua and He Guimei earlier in this chapter) or that “men and women are the same” between the 1950s and 70s imposed more terrible suppression on Chinese women. Zhao holds that such a conclusion is a false question by blindly copying the Western feminist theory, thus

¹⁴⁰Zhu Dongli, “‘Xiaoshen yang’ in the Modern Social Structure”, *Frontiers*, 2011 (5).

¹⁴¹Cui Weiping, “I’m a Woman, Not a Feminist”, *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 1998 (6).

¹⁴²Ibid.

colonization of the Western theories. This leads the feminist criticism in China to an ahistorical situation when it discusses about the Chinese feminist literature.¹⁴³

Chen Juntao points out that feminist criticism in China cannot follow the Western radical route, as feminism in China was born in a post-feminist era and under the influence of the traditional Chinese culture that is mild and prefers a middle course. Therefore, feminism in China isn't as radical or biased as pre-feminism. So it is wise to take a mild way.¹⁴⁴ Qu Yajun sees into the localization of feminism in China and groups the current feminine discourse in modern China into three types, namely mild and government-approved "mainstream feminine discourse", Westernized critical "feminist discourse" and the market-driven "commercial feminine discourse". She stresses the relations between the three types, "A radical feminist discourse keeps the critical attitude toward the male-dominant ideology. However, it would go to a cul-de-sac, once it copies blindly the Western patterns, ignoring the specific context it sits in and standing against the male-dominant culture, without integrating with the first discourse... Therefore, the second type of feminine discourse or feminist discourse shall find a balance between the first and the third in a modern cultural context."¹⁴⁵

The scholars mentioned above, be their arguments and criticism are omnifaceted and appropriate or not, all give a thought on whether West-imported feminism is applicable to the Chinese context, so that those debates well fit into the modern intellectual history of China. In fact, the aforementioned gender issues/topics in the cultural criticism in modern China are of distinctive Chinese features. In them, we see how Chinese scholars attach significance to the specific historical context the issues in China sit in. Also, we hear the sound of "enlightenment or salvation" resonate far from the modern Chinese intellectual history. It remains to be a question which one is more important and fundamental, China or the West, individual or the nation state, enlightenment or salvation.

4 Consumerism and the Body Issue

The body issue draws more attention in the modern social and cultural theories in a consumer society. The academic circles are passionate about the body studies as never before and emerging disciplines such as "sociology of the body", "somaesthetics" and "culturology of the body" come to the horizon one after another. This chapter is focused on what the Chinese academic circles have achieved in the

¹⁴³Zhao Xifang, "Feminism in Dilemma in China", *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 2001 (4).

¹⁴⁴Chen Juntao, "Two Issues in the Chinese Feminist Literary Criticism", *Nanfang Wentan (Literary Circles of the South)*, 2002 (5).

¹⁴⁵Qu Yajun, "Something Important in the Localization of Feminist Literary Criticism" in Li Xiaojiang et al. (eds.), *Culture, Education and Gender: Local Experience and Discipline Building* (Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Publishing House, 2002), p. 168.

concerning fields, in terms of the background of the rise of the fever of body in China, mass media and body consumption, consumerism and body politics, as well as body writing.

1. Rise of Body Studies

(I) The Sociocultural Context of the Fever of Body

(1) The body in consumption culture: from the means to the goal

The body in consumption culture serves as the goal people pursue, instead of the means of achieving other goals.

The body seemed to be doomed in the human history before man stepped into the consumer society. In a traditional society, the agrarian society in ancient China included, people were more or less ascetic, i.e. the body and physical desires were suppressed. In an ascetic society, the body and physical desires were seen as something threatening, dangerous and filthy, causing unruly irrational desires and passions and germinating degeneration. Thus, the body must be placed under the control of reason, soul and cultural rules. Strict and harsh actions were taken to suppress and control the body, such as circumcision in African tribes, Arab costumes and foot-binding in old-day China. The body's values in a traditional society only lay in military affairs, production and reproduction. The body was thus a means to achieve other goals. For instance, the images of strong men and women in the Cultural Revolution were the ideal ones for production, in contrast to "porcelain-faced" intellectuals.

In a consumer society, however, the body has the say. Physical enjoyments become the pursued goal of life. The body indulges itself in consumption and sensual enjoyments. A consumer society strives to build the body to consume and to be consumed. Accordingly, the appearance of the body, i.e. the aesthetic values of the body regardless of production and reproduction, gains more significance. The body turns from a means to the goal and grows into an industry in a consumer society.

(2) Changes in Economic Pattern and Industrial Setup

In a modern consumer society, a metropolis in particular, both cultural and economic activities are conducted around the body. The economic lifeline extends and winds along the development, management, embellishment, toning, show and even trade of the body. Businesses and individuals are bustling around for the body.

The body takes an important position in modern economy, as a city is usually built with various "service businesses" like bath centers, fitness centers, beauty salons and recreational sites. Cosmetic surgery has stirred a fourth wave of consumption following housing, car purchasing and tourism. Body toning and management is an integral part of the modern life and costs a lot (particularly true in women). The sunrise "beauty industry" in the West and China is in essence a body industry.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶See "An Accelerated 'Beauty Industry' in Beijing", *The Beijing News*, 25 November 2003.

(3) Modernity and Disenchantment

Culturally, the religious and ideological doctrines in a consumer society get much weaker in defining, disciplining and controlling the body that enjoys more “freedom” and goes beyond the control of religions. This is a phenomenon of “high modernity” thanks to a higher level of modernization and secularization. We may have a much better understanding of liberation of the body by knowing more about the disenchanting power of modernity over religions. To the contrary, the body, a woman’s body in particular, in some religious countries (such as Arab countries), is still under the harsh control of religious disciplines (with the political power at the same time).¹⁴⁷ The quasi-religious political ideology of the Cultural Revolution in China launched a harsh control over the body as well when men and women were clad in asexual costumes and any “peculiar” ones would be destroyed.

Modernity boosts the disenchantment (desacralization) in society and culture. However, religious beliefs are destroyed in the process of modernization, while no other solid faiths follow. The world seems to fall into an anarchy of faiths with “whatever since God has gone”, while various values fight against each other. The culture in a consumer society lacks the core values that could guide people’s life. In this way, those who lose their religious faiths and are disinterested in the macro political discourse may find something solid in the body that could be reconstructed as the reliable self in the modern world: We have nothing left except our bodies. The appearance of the body is the symbol of self in an era relying on being “young”, “sexy” and “slim”.

It is particularly noteworthy about the Chinese context in which the fever of body emerged. In addition to the reasons similar to those in the Western societies, China witnessed some special social and cultural contexts: Post-totalitarianism and hedonism join hand in China and dominate the society and culture. Tao Dongfeng borrows Havel’s theory in his analysis. Havel gives an in-depth analysis of how post-totalitarianism generates the public’s political despair, political apathy and consumerism. According to Havel, in a post-totalitarian society, people are separated from political participation, so that the latter becomes a routine show without any substantial significance. The entire society is thus plagued with apathy and despair and muddles along. Such political apathy easily slips into consumerism the authority loves to support and encourage as “the freedom of consumption”. In this way, the authority may boost the economic development and more importantly, according to Havel, successfully redirect the public’s focus from political and social problems, to manipulate the society in a safe way. The so-called “freedom of consumption” is evidently at the price of the loss of political freedom.

Tao Dongfeng thinks it fully applicable to the fever of body at present in China. When consumerism began to expand in China in the 1990s, the political body was

¹⁴⁷*Beijing Evening* published on 9 November 2003 an article titled “Miss Afghanistan Sued for Her Bikini Show in the Pageant”: Vida Samadzai, an Afghan girl studying in the United States was to be sued in Afghanistan, as she took part in the Miss Earth Pageant 2003. The Afghan procuratorate thought that the girl violated the commandments of the traditional Afghan culture.

transformed fast into a consumerist one. The previous political narrative degraded rapidly into the fashion- and market-oriented narrative of desires (despite its slogans of feminism or “anti-moral” culture of youth). The body draws people’s attention for being political, critical and radical, while it may be not necessarily so. For instance, pop songs and “peculiar costumes” were thought to be something corrupt in the late 1970s. But they are seen in another way nowadays when consumerism dominates and becomes two-and-one with the national ideology. The radical “body writing” and erotic literary works are to be discussed in the Chinese context then.¹⁴⁸

(II) Translated works on the Western theory of body

Works on the Western theory of body were translated into Chinese around the turning of centuries, greatly boosting the body studies in the Chinese mainland.

Chunfeng Literature & Arts Press first published in 1999 the “Series of Reading Your Body”, including *Five Bodies: Images du corps* (Marc Le Bot), *The Human Shape of Modern Society* (John O’Neill) and *The Body and Society* (Bryan Turner). As is put in “the Editor’s Words”, the series aims to translate into Chinese a number of important academic works on the body studies and introduce this new academic field into China. The editors hope that the Chinese academic circles may explore a broader horizon in those thought-provoking translated works and establish the body studies unique to China. In the meantime, the editors cannot sit by and watch the way the body is interpreted, without doing anything. According to them, the body is wronged and reduced to the flesh in a consumer society, while its higher level is neglected. The body thus is stripped to a consumption machine of sex and commodities. We need in the new century to reevaluate our knowledge of the body and abandon the outdated ideas, building the healthy and beautiful body with deep and profound thoughts.

Hualing Publishing House published in 2002 “the Series of Physiology and Humanity”, including *A History of the Wife* (Marilyn Yalom), *The Kiss and Its History* (Christopher Nyrop) and *A History of the Breast* (Marilyn Yalom).

Those translated works have played a key role in the development of the body studies in China. In the meantime, works on the Western cultural theories related to the body studies were also translated into Chinese, such as Foucault’s thought-provoking works, including *The History of Sexuality* (Xining: Qinghai People’s Publishing House, 1999), *The History of Sexuality* (Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 2000), *The Birth of the Clinic* (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2001), *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2003) and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2003). Chinese scholars have learnt a lot from those translated works on the body studies and related theories. Nonetheless, it

¹⁴⁸Tao Dongfeng (ed.), *Literary Thoughts and Cultural Topics in Modern China* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2008), pp. 347–349.

remains to be solved how to adapt and apply the Western theories of the body studies (and even the entire Cultural Studies) in the Chinese context.

(III) The Body Studies in China

The body studies in China is generally engaged in the translation and publication of Western academic works on the body studies (as mentioned above); the criticism and study of consumption culture; and the combining and study of the traditional Chinese ideas of the body.¹⁴⁹ The body studies covers a wide range of disciplines, including philosophy, history, literature, anthropology, politics, sociology, intellectual history and Cultural Studies. This book intends to investigate the body studies, particularly the complicated relations between consumerism and the body, in modern China from the angle of Cultural Studies.

In general, the body studies in China faces the following problems. First, the theoretical framework is weak. Western theories are usually applied in the study of the Chinese experience and objects, caring little about the Chinese contexts, though, so that Western theories are mechanically copied, instead of being adaptively borrowed. A second problem correlating with the first one is that there is far more theoretical analysis than specific study of the body placed in everyday life in China. Therefore, some scholars hold that “there is yet to be an academic context of the body studies in the Chinese social sciences circle.”¹⁵⁰ Also, the body studies in modern China is usually conducted from an economic and cultural angle, without being placed in a political context,¹⁵¹ so that it is hard to make any accurate analysis of the complicated power relations in the phenomena concerning the body in China (the related research have kept increasing in number in recent years, as to be discussed later). Fourthly, the body studies in China relies more on criticism than construction and is mixed with the Frankfurt School’s thoughts and even some moralistic and idealistic views. The aforementioned problems are worthy of our attention in the analysis of the body studies in China.

2. Mass Media and Body Consumption

Mass media plays a key role in the current fever of body consumption, no doubt. It spares no efforts to trumpet the idea of “a pretty body” and criteria for beauty, pulling and even forcing the public to agree with it, so that they may undergo artificial modifications to their bodies, to cater to those criteria for beauty. This section sees into how mass media trumpets the pattern of an ideal body and what criticisms it receives accordingly.

¹⁴⁹Zeng Qinglin & Chen Mi’ou, “A Review of the Body Studies in the Horizon of Sociology”, *Jiangxi Social Sciences*, 2010 (2).

¹⁵⁰Huang Yingying, *Body, Sex, Sexy: A Study of Young Women’s Daily Life in China’s Cities* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2008), p. 18.

¹⁵¹Tao Dongfeng (ed.), *Literary Thoughts and Cultural Topics in Modern China* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2008), p. 346.

(I) An “Ideal” Body

Mass media uses more acceptable or well-covered rhetorical means, instead of rigid trumpeting words, in its publicity of the body, including slogans for happiness, fashion, freedom and body-oriented ideas.

In the modern society, happiness lies as a scarce resource and everybody is looking for it. A healthy body evidently provides the fundamental guarantee for being happy. Mass media promotes with great efforts the idea of a healthy body. In addition to it, people strive to follow every new fashion, to be attractive and win fame and wealth. A “fashionable” body evidently copies that of someone in vogue. Mass media creates stars and fashion icons in various fashion shows, TV shows, pageants, soap operas and advertisements, repeating what a pretty and fashionable body looks like and how valuable such a body is and how proud and happy the person with such a body would feel. Thus, mass media spares no pains to talk about what stars do with skincare, beauty routines, sports and even body modification. What stars do with their bodies then is seen as the authoritative criteria. It seems that anyone may enjoy a fashionable body as stars do once he/she follows their way.

People in modern days have been pursuing freedom all the time. As shown in what we find in mass media, a person with a pretty body (a woman in particular) often enjoys more freedom; otherwise, he/she may find things more difficult (for instance, a good-looking person feels more at ease in job-hunting, his/her career path and work). Moreover, mass media advocates individuality, individual emotions and legitimate demands to be recognized, as well as individual freedom for enjoying happiness and being pretty. Any decoration or modification to the body is usually seen as the individual freedom.

Mass media also establishes a body-oriented theory; that is, the body is nothing else except itself, leaving any other things aside (such as the relationship between the body and various “-isms”). The aforementioned ideas of happiness, fashion and freedom are all body-oriented. As what we said before, the body is itself the goal, instead of a means.¹⁵²

Many research papers make specific analysis of the propaganda and construction of the body in mass media like television, advertising and fashion magazines. For example, some investigate the programs on Channel Young of Shanghai Television and see into how the image of an ideal body being slim, young, healthy and robust is promoted and constructed basically with the aforementioned theories.¹⁵³

¹⁵²Deng Xiaocheng, “The Illusion of Body in an Era of Mass Media: A Cultural Reflection on the Body (II)”, *Academic Exchange*, 2010 (5).

¹⁵³See Liu Yun, “The Discipline of the Body Made by Fashion TV Programs in an Urban Context of Consumption Culture: A Case Study of Channel Young of Shanghai Television”, a master’s thesis, Fudan University, 2008; Xu Min & Qian Xiaofeng, “Ads for Weight-loss and the Morbid Slimness Culture: On the Cultural Control of Mass Media over the Female Bodies”, *Collection of Women’s Studies*, 2002 (3); and etc.

Mass media sets up the image of an ideal body for the public. Thus, we find the unified criteria for the body in an era when the body would otherwise be free for its development: People are induced and forced to develop their bodies into the same-looking ones.

(II) Mass Media Criticism

What does mass media do to shape the image of an ideal body and conspire with commercial means? Researchers almost unanimously criticize mass media for its constructing an illusion of the surreal body impossible to gain.¹⁵⁴ An advertisement virtually constructs a pseudo context, so that the audience may feel as if they were truly in it: They were the exact image in the ad and able to pursue what they want and become the one they'd like to be. However, an ad is nothing more than an illusion the audience make for themselves. Thus, an advertisement crystallizes consumers' desires. In the illusion of an ad, consumers' desires are controlled, so that consumers feel as if they were the leading role in an advertisement. It is evidently what an ad pursues.¹⁵⁵

In addition to the virtual "reality", the relationship between individuals in an ad is also an imagined one. "The boundaries between sciences and ideologies, real and false consciousness, and reality and imagination are disintegrated in television commercials."¹⁵⁶ Advertising tries to maintain and strengthen the imagined and false relationship it establishes between an individual and his/her real life. The target audience of an advertisement is built into a consumption subject as an entirety under an illusion that remains covered up. In this way, the image of body shaped in advertisements gains a destructive power to deny the reality (particularly the real body). Thus, women feel more worried about and constantly try to modify their bodies.¹⁵⁷

Then how can't modern consumers see through the false advertising or the illusion of the impossible-to-get surreal body? A majority of researchers hold that mass media is hardly resistible due to its overwhelming power of control. Thus, the masses have no other choices than to accept it. Some scholars point that mass media controls a strong discursive power and may create spiritual icons, guide culture and consumption and form trends, to its own will, needs and commercial capitals. In this way, mass media controls the society's ethos and its impacts on people's mentalities and thoughts are considerably enormous. The masses have to yield to mass media's iron control and accept what they are given to. They got finally alienated into one-dimensional man.

¹⁵⁴Zhang Mingquan, "Body Consumption in Mass Media: A Case Study of Ads for Men's Cosmetics", a master's thesis, East China Normal University, 2009.

¹⁵⁵Deng Xiaocheng, "The Illusion of Body in an Era of Mass Media: A Cultural Reflection on the Body (II)", *Academic Exchange*, 2010 (5).

¹⁵⁶Wang Fengzhen (ed.), *Television and Power* (Tianjin: Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2000), p. 208.

¹⁵⁷Li Yuxiao, "An Aesthetic Criticism of Advertisements Concerning Female Bodies in Modern Days", a master's thesis, Lanzhou University, 2007.

Many scholars recognize the active role mass media has played in liberating the body. However, more criticize mass media for its reducing the body into an object and controlling and deceiving the masses who are unable to resist it. We clearly see the traces of the Frankfurt School's theory of mass culture. That may be a generally-accepted standpoint. Hall's encoding/decoding theory is also widely accepted and frequently quoted in Cultural Studies. Those who apply the theory in their studies still focus on the decoder's passiveness and helplessness and the encoder's powerfulness.¹⁵⁸ The negotiated code and the rebellious hegemony between the decoder and the encoder, however, are hardly touched. That is what's in need in the body studies in China.

3. Consumerism and Body Politics

(I) Discipline and Liberation: the Paradox of Body in Consumerism

(1) The Disciplined Body

Foucault's theory of the disciplined body¹⁵⁹ may be a theory the studies of body politics most rely on in modern China. Some scholar makes an analysis of how the state power disciplined people's bodies after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Prior to the reform and opening-up in China, the state power tried to fully tap the potentials of the people's bodies in the national construction by restricting and controlling individuals through its superiorities in economic, political, cultural and propaganda resources, such as household registration, institutionalized units and people's communes, and in forms of various campaigns, such as women's liberation, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Thanks to the reform and opening-up policy, market forces and instrumental rationality have taken the place of the state power in daily life and the body gets less nationalized. The body gets freed from political codes like being revolutionary, sacred, sublime or great and is given something closer to the real life. People even begin to pursue more vulgar values of consumption and their bodies by following the morbid image of somaesthetics constructed and trumpeted by consumption culture, mass media and advertisements. The body is thus reduced to a consumption machine of sex and commodity.¹⁶⁰

The same scholar further points out that consumerism is a new form of discipline of the body. Different from the conventional disciplines, such as schools, hospitals, prisons, factories and military barracks, this new form is an informal and non-institutionalized system under the influence of micro-powers like market system and consumerism outside the state power. Consumerism disciplines the body

¹⁵⁸Ibid.

¹⁵⁹See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Liu Beicheng & Yang Yuanying (trans.), Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2007.

¹⁶⁰Zhao Fangdu, "The Discipline of the Body: the State Power and the Body in China's Modernization—an Example from the Jianxian County in North Sichuan Province", a master's thesis, Nankai University, 2010.

by creating the image of an ideal body, advertising in mass media and normalizing the unified body modification technologies. Consumption culture removes the old restraints on the body and liberates it for more freedom of presentation and communication. On the other hand, the unified and generalized somaesthetics imposes new oppression and violence on the body. Behind a more colorful and beautiful body, we find the power of discipline co-exerted by consumption culture, industrial production and technical rationality.¹⁶¹

This analysis based on Foucault's discipline theory is well received by many other scholars.¹⁶² Many scholars agree that despite the liberated body, somaesthetics imposes more disciplines on the body from the modern state power and consumption culture. The disciplinary power is strong enough to lead to various uncontrollable results: It may reduce the body's resistance and meanings, so that body consumption becomes an important channel to discipline individuals. The disciplined body yields to the power and loses the ability of resistance. To a larger extent, (the disciplined) pleasure is nothing more than to deliberately blunt one's will.¹⁶³

(2) The Self-controlled Body

The power of discipline seems too strong to be resisted. Is that true? Field studies have revealed the complicated reasons behind the body plan: The body is never passively disciplined. The body plan witnesses the happiness from self-identification. One feels confident about controlling his/her own body. A study conducted over the content of *SELF* magazine concludes that women in the Chinese mainland find their happiness best from the self-fulfilling process and they make initiative body training or plan as an important way of self-fulfilling. Huang Yingying makes interviews with young women in China's cities about their attitudes toward the body plan and concludes that bodybuilding doesn't necessarily mean the control or alienation of women, as many interviewees talk about how happy they feel in bodybuilding: They feel "happy", "confident", "full of energy", "comfortable" and "a vitality of life" in bodybuilding. In addition to bodybuilding, people apply make-ups or go to beauty salons for "good moods", "a better looking" or "feeling more confident". In general, women do with their bodies for multiple needs of "a good figure", "looking pretty and young", "health" and "self-confidence". This plays a positive and rational role, to some extent, in

¹⁶¹Zhao Fangdu, "Consumerism: A New Discipline of the Body", *Journal of East China University of Science and Technology*, 2011 (3).

¹⁶²Such as Ji Zhipeng, "A Construction of the Body by Consumption Culture", *Academic Exchange*, 2009 (5); Liu Jv, "Body's Liberation and Aesthetic Salvation in Consumer Context", *Beifang Luncong (Collected Essays in the North)*, 2011 (4); and Bai Wei, "A Modern Paradox of the Body Consumption by Chinese Women since the Reform and Opening-up", *Academic Journal of Zhongzhou*, 2010 (5).

¹⁶³Liao Shuwu, *Somaesthetics and Consumer Context* (Shanghai: Joint Publishing, 2011), pp. 119–121.

encouraging women to care about and present their bodies.¹⁶⁴ The old idea that women are controlled may be revalued in this light.

(3) Doubts about Foucault's Discipline Theory

As shown in the aforementioned analyses, the body is never an alienated, non-self or disciplined object or result, for various reasons. In addition, an individual has his/her own appeals to and even self-identification with the body. Thus, many scholars question Foucault's discipline theory, holding that the theory may be defective, despite its depth. Discipline need not be either violent or coercive; instead, it can go deeper and be more concealed. Also, people happily do what they like to their bodies. The process is not necessarily a passive or forced one. Instead, it becomes people's inner needs. Foucault talks about the possibility of a counter-discourse; however, when talking about the relation between power and body, he in general negates subjectivity and the active role a subject plays in history. In a modern society, the body and power are related and interact in a dialectical way. The body is controlled and managed by power, while it also serves as a means to struggle against and resist power.¹⁶⁵

The view actually amounts to a profound insight.

As the process of modernization continues, the sense of self-awareness also grows stronger, making the body decreasingly amenable to plans, which will become increasingly concealed, but never disappear completely. People seem to be forever trapped in this dilemma. The key questions, however, are how the body is planned for, put up resistance and achieves self-construction. There has so far been too little research on these questions far. Foucault's one-sided discipline theory continues to be the major inspirations for theories about the body until this day.

(II) The Observer and the Observed: Gender Discrimination in Consumerism

Body discrimination is not uncommonly seen in body consumption in a consumer society, such as gender discrimination and the discrimination against physical disability, race and color of skin. What we talk about here is gender discrimination, which is particularly evident in advertisements and draws much attention from scholars. Please refer to related sections in Chap. 5, titled Feminism and Gender Issues.

4. Body Writing and Its Criticism

"Body writing" emerged on China's literature scene and drew much attention around 2000. But it has never simply been a subject of literary or academic attention; rather, it is a social and cultural phenomenon worthy of scholarly

¹⁶⁴Huang Yingying, *Body, Sex, Sexy: A Study of Young Women's Daily Life in China's Cities* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2008), p. 297.

¹⁶⁵Lu Yang (ed.), *An Overview of Cultural Studies* (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2008), p. 151.

attention. This part focuses on how body writing arose in China and related debates around it and makes a critical review of it.

(I) Emergence of Body Writing and Related Debates

Ge Hongbing is generally recognized as the one who proposed the idea of “body writing” in early days. According to Ge, “I first used the term (body writing) in a letter to Mianmian in the summer of 1995.”¹⁶⁶ Mianmian confirmed it later in an interview, saying that body writing in Ge Hongbing’s letter was generated “from my (Ge’s) writing”.¹⁶⁷

Nanfan published “Body Rhetoric: Portraits and Sex” in 1996 (*Wenyi Zhengming* [Debates in Literature and Arts], 1996 [4]), making an analysis of “the body” in literary works and putting forth the concept of “body rhetoric”. Body writing “builds characters’ bodies in a system of meanings of particular codes” that serve as a definitive property of culture.

Ge Hongbing published in 1997 “Individual Literature and Authors of Body Writing: A Transition in Fictions in the 1990s” (*Mountain Flowers*, Issue 3). Without clearly defining what “body writing” is in this article, Ge elaborates on how authors of body writing emerged and on their characteristics. Authors of body writing listed by Ge in this article include Wei Hui and Mianmian, as well as some others earlier than them, such as Han Dong, Zhu Wen, Chen Ran and Lin Bai, male and female. Ge Hongbing actually defines authors of body writing in a broad sense.¹⁶⁸

Dong Zhilin put forth the idea of “body writing” in her “Women’s Writing and Historical Sites: ‘Body Writing’ of the 1990s and Other Literary Thoughts” (*Literary Review*, 2000 [6]) published in 2000. Dong elaborates on body writing by adopting the “body writing” theory in the Western feminist criticism, particularly the theory of Cixous. According to Dong, women’s writing in modern Chinese mainland had somehow estranged itself from grand narratives before feminist theories were introduced from the West. The authors of body writing mentioned in Dong’s article include Ding Ling, Ru Zhijuan, Zhang Jie, Wang Anyi and Tie Ning, without talking about Wei Hui, Mianmian, Chen Ran or others put in this group by Ge Hongbing and other scholars.

Xie Youshun published in 2001 “Literary Somatology” (*Flower City*, 2001 [6] and a summary edition in *Contemporary Writers Review*, 2002 [1]), criticizing the

¹⁶⁶Ge Hongbing, “Ge Hongbing’s Memory of ‘the New Generation’”, http://stlib.net/dsps/disp_dsps.asp?sendid=5635.

¹⁶⁷“The Life in Mianmian’s Eyes: A Talk with Mianmian”, <http://news.21cn.com/dushi/ds/2003/07/25/1197946.shtml>.

¹⁶⁸Many articles hold that Ge Hongbing first put forth the idea of “body writing” in his essay titled “An Era of Individual Culture and Authors of Body Writing,” published on *Mountain Flowers* in 1996, as Ge Hongbing writes in his “Ge Hongbing’s Memory of ‘the New Generation’” (see above for the source). However, no such article appeared in any 1996 issue of *Mountain Flowers*. Ge may have made a mistake here. What he might have meant is “Individual Literature and Authors of Body Writing: A Transition in Fictions in the 1990’s,” published in *Mountain Flowers* in 1997.

then literary trend focusing on physical pleasures of the body. According to Xie, the body in literary works is never the purely material flesh. The human body won't be a body in the literary sense unless it is an ethically poetic one. That's what Xie calls literary somatology.

As shown in materials at hand, the idea of "body writing" wasn't put forth or clearly defined by Chinese literary critics between 1995 and 2001 (body writing was indeed mentioned in some articles, without being used as a particular term, though). "Body writing" at that time was like an accessory to concepts such as feminine literature, women's writing and private writing. Authors like Wei Hui and Mianmian were usually discussed and criticized in a broader background of women's writing.

Wei Hui and Mianmian approached the peak of their writing in 2001, while Jiudan and Zhuyingqingtong drew readers' attention for their out-of-the-box style. Muzimei, in particular, dashed into readers' vision.¹⁶⁹ With those authors, body writing stood out as a clearly-defined and independent concept around 2002.¹⁷⁰ The number of publications, and master's theses and doctoral dissertations on the topic grew. Many symposiums on this topic were organized. Debates of "body writing" intensified and reached climax around 2004.¹⁷¹

As a part of the obsession about the body, body writing emerged and flourished in the same social, historical and cultural conditions that shaped the obsession about the body, including the loosening of political control, the spread of consumerism,¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹Wei Hui published her *Shanghai Baby* (Shenyang: Chunfeng Literature & Arts Press) and *Scream of the Butterfly* (Changsha: Hunan Literature and Art Press) in 1999 and *Virgin in the Water* (Shijiazhuang: Huashan Literature and Art Press) in 2000. Mianmian published her *Candies* (Beijing: China Drama Press) in 2000 and *Ballroom Dance* (Beijing: New World Press) in 2002. *Lower Body* magazine was founded in 2000. *Crows* (Wuhan: Changjiang Literature and Art Press) authored by Jiudan, whose works were called by some as "prostitute's literature", was published in 2001. The Internet ID Zhuyingqingtong emerged in 2002, who kept posting erotic photos and articles. Muzimei from Guangzhou began to post her sex diaries on Internet in June 2003. Body writing came to its "climax".

¹⁷⁰Nobody can tell who first adopted this concept. It is hardly confirmed whether Ge Hongbing first used it in 1995. Nonetheless, it has little to do with our understanding of body writing.

¹⁷¹For more details of the symposiums, see He Yugao & Li Xiuping, "A Summary of 'the Symposium on Body Writing and the Cultural Symptoms in an Era of Consumption'", *Literary Review*, 2004 (4); and Zhang Liquan, "The Symposium on 'Body Writing' in the Contemporary Poetry", *Newsletter of the Chinese Poetry Studies*, 2004 (1). Some periodicals published related articles as well, such as the sketches and notes under the title "Body Writing and Its Cultural Implications" on *Seeking Truth*, 2004 (4); the articles under the title "A Literary Investigation into Body Writing" on *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 2004 (5); and the sketches and notes of "Theories and Practices of Somaesthetics" on *Academic Journal of Zhongzhou*, 2005 (3). Doctoral dissertations and master's theses concerning the topic include Meng Gang, "Body Utopia in an Era of Consumption" (doctoral dissertation, Zhejiang University, 2004) and Ke Xiaofeng, "From 'Body Discourse' to 'Body Writing'" (master's thesis, Southwest China Normal University, 2005).

¹⁷²It may be seen as "lust economics". Chen Dingjia, *Body Writing and Cultural Symptoms: An Introduction*, Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2011.

the growing prominence of mass media¹⁷³ and the introduction to feminist body theories of the West. The major (and even the only) influential work is “The Laugh of the Medusa” authored by the French scholar Hélène Cixous and collected in *The Criticism of Feminist Literature in Modern Days* (Zhang Jingyuan [ed.], Beijing: Peking University Press, 1992). Body writing in China may not emerge under the inspiration of the Western body writing theory. However, people tried to find in the Western body writing theory some support or proof for body writing in China when the latter sat on its peak. And Cixous’s theory was thought to be the best evidence. But the specific context in China was ignored when the theory was borrowed and applied. Thus, differences in aesthetic features and philosophical connotations between Chinese and Western histories, cultures and texts are ignored.¹⁷⁴ It is worthy of further review and awareness.¹⁷⁵

(II) Definition and Criticism of Body Writing

What is body writing? The definition may vary, as standpoints differ. Also, it varies when the object of body writing is defined in different ways. Generally, authors of body writing are categorized into three groups, namely the so-called “beauty writers” including Wei Hui, Mianmian, Jiudan and Zhuyingqingtong, who stand as the core of body writing; the writers engaged in feminine writing or private writing, such as Chen Ran and Lin Bai; and other modern and contemporary writers who write about bodies, for instance, Tie Ning, Wang Anyi and Ding Ling. However, it may be better called as the body studies in literature, not the same as body writing in a strict sense.

(1) Pornographic Body Writing

Many scholars criticize body writing or hold negative attitudes toward it, mainly against the first group mentioned above. For instance, Qian Zhongwen puts the idea of body writing “in a derogatory sense”. According to him, “body writing” emerged against a particular background and is a sensationalized thing in media’s manipulation. Generated from consumerism, body writing turns human bodies into commodities and morals change radically. The negative side leads to the erotic

¹⁷³Li Huaxiu, “How ‘Body Writing’ Emerged and Its Meaning”, *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, 2002 (6); Yu Quanheng, “A Symptomatic Analysis of ‘Body Writing’”, *Journal of Yangtze Normal University*, 2011 (3); Chen Zhiping, “Phenomena of ‘Body Writing’ in a Communication Perspective”, *Journal of Hebei Socialist College*, 2009 (2); Yan Zhen, “The Historical Context of Body Writing”, *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 2004 (5); and Zeng Daorong, “Body Writing: A Business Practice of Profit-seeking Media”, *Journal of Fujian Institute of Education*, 2007 (4).

¹⁷⁴Ouyang Cancan & Yu Qi, “What ‘Body Writing’ Brought to China and Its Changes in China: from a Perspective of Gender and Body”, *Journal of Southwest University for Nationalities*, 2008 (5).

¹⁷⁵See Mi Ruixin, “History of ‘Body Writing’ in China and a Reflection”, *Collection of Women’s Studies*, 2010 (4).

descriptions of sex and body, hitting hard ethics and morals.¹⁷⁶ Evidently, Qian sees body writing as something with excessive description of sex, almost equal to “sex writing”¹⁷⁷ and pornography. Zhu Guohua gives a statement more clearly, “To be frank, body writing is right a euphemistic phrase for pornography. It pursues sex or sexual attraction.” According to Zhu, works by Wei Hui, Mianmian and Zhuyingqingtong, are filled with strong moral nihilism that would destroy the spirit of enlightenment if people let it be.¹⁷⁸ Other scholars also criticize body writing for its pornographic and erotic descriptions.¹⁷⁹

(2) Positive Attitudes toward Body Writing

In addition to the criticisms and even condemnation of body writing, some scholars hold positive attitudes toward it, from various perspectives, though. Ge Hongbing reviews the cultural transition taking place in China since the 1990s and holds that body writing has played a positive role in the transition. According to Ge, China has since the 1990s experienced a cultural transition process, during which the Chinese culture keeps turning from being collective and rational to an individual and emotional one, as demonstrated by individual literature. Body writing is a feature of individual literature, in which “my experience” takes the priority. That is, an author first sees himself/herself as an individual before representing his/her experience to readers. It is a philosophy of body that justifies the body’s experience. The rules for body are personal, non-rational and about desires. The philosophy of body dominates the era of individual culture and subverts all the traditional spiritual philosophies.

More scholars see body writing in a positive light from the angles of feminism and women’s liberation, in addition to the aforementioned cultural transition. In this sense, body writing demonstrates that women have successfully overthrown the male dominance. However, such attitudes are mostly held for authors like Chen Ran and Lin Bai. Xiang Rong points out in his “A Broken Mirror: Body Writing and Its Cultural Imagination in Feminine Literature” that women have long been “represented” by others, while they began in the 1990s to see their bodies through their own eyes, rediscovering what they truly are. That is the narrative motive and goal of body writing. To put it in a simple way, “Body writing aims to help women regain the right to interpret their own bodies and describe their own bodies to their own will, so as to reestablish the rhetoric for women’s bodies and end the days when men had a say that ‘She has a body’.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶He Yugao & Li Xiuping, “A Summary of ‘the Symposium on Body Writing and the Cultural Symptoms in an Era of Consumption’”, *Literary Review*, 2004 (4).

¹⁷⁷Yan Zhen, “The Historical Context of Body Writing”, *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 2004 (5).

¹⁷⁸Zhu Guohua, “An Interrogation to Body Writing”, *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 2004 (5).

¹⁷⁹See Peng Yafei, “A Doubt of ‘Body Writing’”, *Seeking Truth*, 2004 (4); and Huang Yingquan, “Destructing the Feminist Fairy Tale of ‘Body Writing’”, *Seeking Truth*, 2004 (4).

¹⁸⁰Xiang Rong, “A Broken Mirror: Body Writing and Its Cultural Imagination in Feminine Literature”, *Journal of Southwest University for Nationalities*, 2003 (3).

Other scholars hold more or less the same attitudes and even see the works by Wei Hui and Mianmian as “a vehement way of writing,¹⁸¹ with which those female writers boldly unveil women’s bodies and distorted souls oppressed by a patriarchal culture for too long a time. They represent women’s unique experience from a marginalized position and resolutely subvert the traditional moral order, smashing the fairy tale of patriarchy and challenging the patriarchal system. In a word, body writing hits hard the long-established ideology of men’s absolute domination over women in a patriarchal society.¹⁸² It is a rebellion and liberation of women.

However, many scholars remain doubtful about the positive role body writing plays. For example, someone clearly states that body writing has nothing to do with feminism.¹⁸³ “Body writing subverts nothing. It is nothing more than a cheating fairy tale fabricated by the writers in pursuit of fame and money and by the boots-licking critics.”¹⁸⁴

(3) Power Relations in Body Writing

In addition to the aforementioned opposite comments on body writing, many other scholars try to analyze the complicated power relations behind body writing from a neutral standpoint.

Zhu Dake analyzes in his “Cultural Logics of Body Narrative” the complicated logical relations behind body writing, including logics of feminism, rebellion, hedonism and market. According to Zhu, Muzimei’s body narrative was originally nothing more than indecent exposure, to cater to voyeurs, before it was forced by men into a feminist battle. And those female writers gain fame, money and power by making use of their body advantage. However, their rebellious way of narrative is filled with moral dangers and those female writers are like someone naked walking on the “discourse” tight-rope. They launch an attack all alone on the gigantic traditional community and set a fire in the male-dominant field. Ideology gradually lost its ground to hedonism. The Western middle-class dashed crazily to sexual liberation and pleasure when ideology declined. Lust got itself freed in China in such a global scene. Consumption liberates sensual desire and clears up its toxicity. Sensual desire thus takes an appearance of stability satisfying the authority. None may sit free from market forces in an era of global capitalism. Body consumption and lust economics grow fast and strong, opening an enormous

¹⁸¹Liu Wenju, “On the Marginalized Rebellion Made by Wei Hui and Mianmian with Their Body Writing”, *Social Sciences in Heilongjiang*, 2009 (2).

¹⁸²Zhao Yanqiu, “From the Observed to the Observer: the Hit on Ideology from Feminine Body Writing”, *Criticism and Creation*, 2007 (1).

¹⁸³Zhang Guotao, “On ‘Body Writing’”, *Beifang Luncong (Collected Essays in the North)*, 2005 (5).

¹⁸⁴Huang Yingquan, “Destructing the Feminist Fairy Tale of ‘Body Writing’”, *Seeking Truth*, 2004 (4); and Yan Zhen, “The Historical Context of Body Writing”, *Wenyi Zhengming (Debates in Literature and Arts)*, 2004 (5).

international market for authors like Wei Hui. Market keeps a tight control over culture and turns it into an accessory to capital operation.¹⁸⁵

In all, complicated power relations hide in body writing. The four aforementioned cultural logics have shaped the “nature” of body writing and are worthy of our attention when we try to know more about body writing, even though Zhu Dake makes no further elaboration. Only in this way can we find the cultural symptoms behind body writing.

Meng Fanhua puts Zhu Dake’s idea of body narrative in a more vivid way, calling it “a combat”: The body is actually a process of construction and deconstruction filled with incessant combats. According to Meng, the times of revolutions witnessed no combats of the body; instead, it was filled with confrontations and combats between the revolutionary/the counterrevolutionary, the progressive/the reactionary, the Left/the Right, the proletarian/the bourgeoisie, and landowners/poor and lower-middle peasants. Events in the realm of spirit were back then prioritized over body narrative. From the 1980s onwards, the narrative of personal emotions and the concern of body took the ground, in a heroically tragic manner, though. However, such a narrative confined itself within the relations between men and women. Stories of bodies remain attractive to writers and things concerning men and women seem to be the Sphinx’s riddle. Combats of bodies went on in a large scale in the novels of the early 21st century. Nonetheless, the fighting scenes remained the male-dominant, while women could do nothing except to evade, accept or endure. In a “modern” society, violence, revolutionary or counterrevolutionary, came to an end and the combats aiming to hurt or eliminate bodies in flesh disappeared. Then, another entirely different combat of body kicks off around the globe. It’s a continuous combat without the front and in various forms. Endless body consumption results in endless tensions. Different from the previous male-dominant combat where women’s bodies were controlled, this new combat of body between men and women is fought initiatively by women.

In modern days, a female-dominant combat of body is started, such as body plans for women. It seems that women devote themselves to this combat. In actuality, a fashion or women’s “own” demand is always generated by social, cultural and political powers. A combat aims to conquer. However, women fight their combat of body, to conquer men and the world by yielding. Or rather to say, women fight and conquer under the control of cultural and political powers, without being able to shape independently or grasp their personal life. We may even say that women are doomed to be controlled by culture and politics. Anyhow, combating bodies permeate our life. Women tell stories with their bodies. Men are carried away by wild physical pleasure. Body narrative lies as the core of daily life in a modern society.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵Zhu Dake, “Cultural Logics of Body Narrative”, *Xinmin Weekly*, 8 June 2004.

¹⁸⁶Meng Fanhua, “The Combating Body and Culture and Politics”, *Seeking Truth*, 2004 (4).

5 Media Studies in Modern China

This chapter focuses on media studies in modern China. Media studies deals with almost all the disciplines of humanities and some of natural sciences.¹⁸⁷ Media studies is conducted in various paradigms. However, paradigms of Cultural Studies are less used in media studies in modern China, with little achieved. The chapter only sees into media studies conducted in the paradigms of Cultural Studies and reviews media studies in modern China from three angles, namely media production, texts and audience.

1. Cultural Studies and Critical Media Studies

(I) The Critical Theory Paradigm of Media Studies

There are usually two paradigms (or schools) of media studies, namely the traditional school or the empirical paradigm represented by media studies in the United States; and the critical theory paradigm represented by researchers in Europe.¹⁸⁸ The critical theory paradigm of media studies is mainly drawn from the Frankfurt School's critical theory, plus semiotics-structuralism, Birmingham School's cultural studies, political economy, as well as cultural imperialism and post-modernist cultural theory.¹⁸⁹ Then how are media studies conducted within Cultural Studies?

Erni points out in his "Media Studies and Cultural Studies: A Symbiotic Convergence" that Cultural Studies and media studies tend to integrate, as both: (1) Examine mass communication from the angle of critical theory of mass culture; (2) Apply the knowledge and standpoints of semiotics and ideological criticism in media studies; (3) Strengthen the identity-based media studies, such as concerns about identity politics and gender politics, as well as racial politics and sex politics; and (4) Establish a methodological framework bridging the criticism of political

¹⁸⁷Yin Hong, "Specialized, Culture-oriented and Diversified Media Studies" in Wang Yuechuan (ed.), *Media Philosophy* (Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 2004), p. 254.

¹⁸⁸Scholars may categorize paradigms of media studies in different ways. Some categorize them into three types, namely objective empirical paradigm, interpretative empirical paradigm and critical theory (Liu Hailong, *Mass Communication Theory: Paradigms and Schools*, Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2008). Some list the paradigms as positivism, interpretative sociology and critical sociology (Wu Fei & Wang Xuecheng, *Communication, Culture and Society*, Jinan: Shandong People's Publishing House, 2006), or as experience-function, control theory and structuralist methodology (Chen Weixing, *Ideas of Communication*, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2004). Others may see the paradigms of media studies in the light of empiricism, technicism and criticism (Hu Yiqing, *Communication: Crisis of the Discipline and Revolution of Paradigms*, Beijing: Capital Normal University Press, 2004). However, it is more common to put the paradigms in two categories; see Chen Lidan, "Three Schools of Communication Methodology", *Journalism and Communication*, 2005 (2).

¹⁸⁹See Yu Deshan, *Modern Media: An Introduction* (Beijing: China Radio Film & TV Press, 2012), pp. 5–15.

economy of communication and the cultural studies of media.¹⁹⁰ Some Chinese scholars summarize the core issue of the critical media studies as “control”: “To put it simply, critical theories focus on political, economic and cultural issues. Despite varying foci, they all investigate the issues from a standpoint of Western Marxism; that is, to discuss about ‘control’—‘Who controls communication’, ‘Why do they control’ and ‘Who the controlling power serve’. Even today, some critics in this ideology cling on the issues of ownership and controlling power of mass media institutes. In another word, critical theories focus on ‘Why do they control’ or ‘Why don’t they control’, while empirical scholars pay attention to ‘How to communicate’ and ‘How much to communicate’.”¹⁹¹ We talk about media studies in China in this chapter concerning media production, texts and impacts on audience by focusing on power/control.¹⁹²

(II) History of Critical Media Studies in China

Critical theories and methods of media studies have long been introduced to China. According to Professor Liu Hailong,¹⁹³ critical media studies drew attention from Chinese scholars as early as in the late 1970s and 80s.¹⁹⁴ Wang Zhixing, a student in the postgraduate program of School of Journalism and Communication, China Renmin University who later go to study in Britain, read his “An Analysis of Critical Schools of Europe and Traditional Schools in the U.S.” (*Journal of Journalism*, 1986 [6]) which drew much attention on the Second National Conference on Communication. It may be the first detailed analysis of critical schools. In 1987, Guo Qingguang published in *Collection of Papers on Journalism and Communication*, Issue 11, “A New Force in the Studies of Mass Communication: An Analysis of Critical Schools of Europe”. It was the first paper that talks about critical schools of communication in a comprehensive way in

¹⁹⁰Miller, Toby (ed.), *A Companion to Cultural Studies*, Wang Xiaolu (trans.) (Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2009), p. 154.

¹⁹¹Wu Fei & Wang Xuecheng, *Communication, Culture and Society* (Jinan: Shandong People’s Publishing House, 2006), p. 113.

¹⁹²For features of paradigms of media studies, see Qin Yi, “Criticism Joining Hands: Changing Relations Between Cultural Studies and Political Economy of Communication”, *Hubei Social Sciences*, 2009 (11); Mei Qionglin, “Media Studies in the View of Cultural Studies”, *Beifang Luncong (Collected Essays in the North)*, 2005 (5); Liu Xiaohong, “Coexisting, Confronting, Learning: Changing Relations Between Political Economy of Communication and Cultural Studies”, *Journalism and Communication*, 2005 (1); Feng Ting, “Surfacing Culture: Media Studies in Cultural Sociology”, *Journal of Zhejiang Party School of C.P.C.*, 2006 (4); Zhao Yuezhi & Xing Guoxin, “The Political Economy of Communication” in Liu Shuming & Hong Junhao (eds.), *Communication*, Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2007.

¹⁹³Liu Hailong, “‘The Missing’ in the Introduction of ‘Communication’: On Early Ideas of Communication in China 1978–1989 When Critical Theories Were Introduced”, *Journalism and Communication*, 2007 (4).

¹⁹⁴See CASS Institute of Journalism and CASS Lab of the World News (eds.), *Communication (Brief)*, Beijing: People’s Daily Press, 1983; and Zhang Li, “Status Quo of Institutes of Communication in the U.S. and Western Europe”, *Journal of Journalism*, 1986 (4).

China. *Agents of Power* translated by Huang Huang and others (Beijing: Huaxia Publishing House, 1989) is the first translated work on critical schools of communication.

In the 1990s, the academic circles began to pay more attention to critical theories and more papers, textbooks, monographs, collections and websites on theories of Cultural Studies came to sight. Critical schools of media studies witnessed substantial development as well. However, the studies conducted under critical theories remains weak compared with that under empirical theories, and seems “looming”¹⁹⁵ in media studies. Some scholars hold that this is because the subject of communication in China has in the past three decades had no critical thinking or organized skepticism to itself and discipline, without any substantial criticisms or reflections on the epistemological tools it adopted. Others see it as a typical result of “de-politicized politics”. A critic points that in the times when the academic circles had a reflection of “the Cultural Revolution” and ideological emancipation, the press circle was too eager to discard previously politics-oriented journalism and communication, while it got blinded by the seemingly-depoliticized U.S. communication theory and practice saturated with the ideology of the Cold War.¹⁹⁶

Weak paradigms may further impede the development of media studies with the Chinese characteristics.

2. Media Production and Power Relations

(I) Media Production and Political Economy

Political economy serves as the major base of the studies of media production. Here we won't go deep into the earlier conflicts between and debates over Cultural Studies and political economy; instead, political economy is seen as an integral part of Cultural Studies in the broad sense,¹⁹⁷ so that we may with it investigate how media is produced, spread and consumed and the power relations involved.

Media (communication) studies was first conducted in the paradigm of political economy roughly in the 1930s. In this paradigm, media communication is seen as a political economic activity, to examine the political-economic factors involved in media production, distribution, circulation, exchange and consumption and unveil the power relations between the state, society, media organs and audience. The paradigm attaches particular importance to the control and restraints imposed by political and economic powers on media production and communication. For instance, it examines how production goods are possessed and controlled in media communication, how media products are distributed and how audience consumes media products (in a passive manner).

¹⁹⁵Li Bin, “On the Schools of Communication”, *Chinese Journal of Journalism & Communication*, 2001 (2).

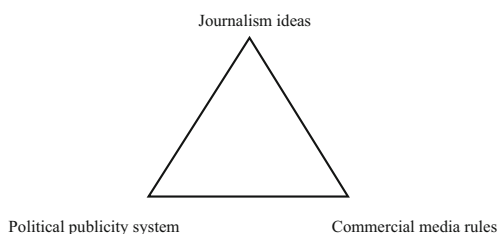
¹⁹⁶Quoted from Li Bin, “Critical Schools and China”, *Youth Journalist*, 2013 (01).

¹⁹⁷See in Maxwell, Richard, “Political Economy within Cultural Studies” in Miller, Toby (ed.), *A Companion to Cultural Studies*, Wang Xiaolu (trans.), Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2009.

The studies of political economy of communication emerged in China comparatively late. The Chinese academic circles are now yet to fully integrate with the international studies of political economy of communication, as documentation citation remains weak. In spite of some topics that may belong to the analysis of political economy of communication, Chinese scholars tend to adopt self-created methodologies and thoughts, without any schools in the making.¹⁹⁸

(II) Power Relations in Media Production

Lu Ye and Pan Zhongdang illustrate the space of journalism practice in a co-authored article,¹⁹⁹ as shown in the following diagram:



According to the authors, political publicity system, commercial media rules and press (media) practitioners' ideas stand in constant conflicts, interrelated and interdependent. The three powers co-shape the historical scene press practitioners conduct their activities in the social transition. We may make a change to the above diagram, i.e. to replace journalism ideas with media communication organs. Then in the general media production, we find the same relation pattern of the powers, fighting, coordinating and compromising.

Lu and Pan first examine how the aforementioned powers try to incorporate and counter-incorporate. According to the two authors, the reform of journalism in modern China has been launched under the CPC's leadership and publicity activities have basically followed the political power (including administrative and ideological requirements). The political power has dominated press (media) production by "force" and "incorporation". It incorporates "alternative" discourses and

¹⁹⁸Guo Zhenzhi, "My Thoughts on Political Economy of Communication", *Modern Communication*, 2002 (1).

¹⁹⁹Except the otherwise annotated, the quotes in this section are cited from Lu Ye and Pan Zhongdang, "An Imagination of Fame: How Press Practitioners Build Their Professionalist Discourse in the Social Transition", *Mass Communication Research* (Taipei), No. 71, 2002. In addition, some other quotes are from Lu Ye, "A Study of the Forms of Power in News Production" in *Media Education and Media Studies in an Information Era: Collection of Papers on the Second China Communication Forum* (Vol. I), 2002; and Lu Ye and Yu Weidong, "Factors in News Production in the Social Transition", *Shanghai Journalism Review*, 2003 (3), if not otherwise stated.

practices into the dominant ideological and power system, to make them into justified routines, so that “the alternative” got finally tamed into an integral part of the existing system. News review and approval may be the epitome of “force” and “incorporation” means. A scheduled program may be changed or cancelled due to a phone call from above. That’s a case of administrative power. Besides, media organs receive every day “requirements” issued by the higher or competent authority, asking them “to follow the circulation issued by XXX”, or “not to report the event of XXX”, or “to adopt the wire copy issued by XXX”. It is the political power that plays as well.

However, neither media organizations nor individual reporters and journalists would face the spectre of being institutionalized without putting up a fight. They would always try to find ways to circumvent authorities’ requirements. Nonetheless, it may be a common practice in modern Chinese society to evade, thwart or otherwise disobey orders from the higher-ups. For example, the masthead of *Beijing Daily* is written in black cursive in three columns. The front page always covers exclusively activities of the CPC and the government. Page five, titled “Beijing News”, is reserved for more colorful news. The page has its own masthead in red boldface in four columns that is more eye-catching than the front pages. A newspaper of a large circulation in Shanghai also dedicates the front page to “the routine content”, while the other pages are organized in a market-oriented way.

Nonetheless, reality is usually not as that beautiful as what theory illustrates. Press practitioners may experience various difficulties and failures when they try to counter-incorporate, as in China, few media organs stand free from the political system, so that the political power exerts the direct control over media organs on every level and further over every individual involved. None can escape from being institutionalized. Compromising may sometimes be the only choice.

In the meantime, a media organ is run for propaganda under a monopoly system and plagued with administrative hierarchies; therefore, press practitioners have little chance to do the job in a way journalism should be. They feel frustrated and disappointed. Thus, press practitioners’ professionalist ideas remain “the only framework able to shape journalism into an independent, open-minded and rational ‘public sphere’ of true and full information”.²⁰⁰ It is a hard task, though.

(III) Centennial Anniversary of Peking University: A Case of Media Production

Compared to articles focusing on generalized theories, the case study of specific press events or practice in China may better illustrate the features of media operation in the Chinese mainland, thus is of higher academic values. “The Centennial

²⁰⁰Pan Zhongdang and Chen Taowen, “Career Assessment and Degree of Satisfaction of Press Practitioners in China’s Reform: Questionnaires for Press Practitioners in Two Cities”, *China Media Report* (Hong Kong), 2005 (1); cited from Xie Jing and Xu Xiaoge, “Media Organization and Communication Patterns and Their Relationship with News Production”, *Journalism Bimonthly*, 2008 (4).

Anniversary of Peking University: The Analysis of a Cultural Event” authored by Xiong Hao is particularly noteworthy. The author sees the celebration activities of the university’s centennial anniversary, press coverage included, as a cultural event and analyzes how social powers got involved in the production of this cultural event, such as the government, the university, media, businessmen, event planners, common people and the university’s alumni. They co-created the cultural event of the centennial anniversary of Peking University and co-represented it in mass media.

The author investigates the conflicts, confrontations and games between all the powers involved in media publicity concerning this event. For the government, Peking University embraces factors “precarious” to the state ideology (such as a tradition of liberal thoughts) and is the birthplace of Marxism in China where revolutionary figures like Cai Yuanpei and Ma Yinchu worked. Those figures are important to the CPC’s ideological publicity. The centennial anniversary of such a university may help the government further promote its ideology or potentially diminish the legitimacy of the regime in authority. It was a headache for the government how to deal with the event appropriately.

Peking University is always a legend-like attraction to common people and shines the glory of a unique taste of culture and a charm of intellectual personality. Some hoped to see strengthened liberal thoughts in this event and others expected an academic rejuvenation in the university. Common people held different anticipations to the university’s centennial anniversary from those of the government.

Businessmen looked at the university’s centennial anniversary in the same light of any other sensational stories in the Chinese society. Be it the university’s political significance or cultural taste, it stood in businessmen’s eyes as a chance of fat profits.

Event planners saw the event as a mega-hit and found press values in it. They were pushed forward by their impulse to make the university’s celebration activities into hot products by way of modern PR means. Event planning insiders may agree that anyone who made a success in this event would set up a milestone on the history of public relations of China.

Moreover, the university’s alumni may be the ones who most anticipated the anniversary. They held sincere wish for a better future of their alma mater, as they would benefit from it in turn.

Accordingly, various participants anticipated different things in Peking University’s centennial anniversary and boosted different cultural production models of this event. Anyhow, all the participants strived to produce in this event some meanings favorable to their benefits. According to Xiong Hao, the anniversary celebration was designed and planned “in exchange for something” (Peking University, in particular, was able to capitalize on its long history and international reputation, to enter into a dialogue with the government). We find in Peking University’s anniversary celebration, as a media event, the tussle and exchange among various political, economic and cultural powers. Nonetheless, it doesn’t

necessarily mean that all social units in China enjoy the same space or freedom to dialogue with the government as Peking University does.²⁰¹

3. Media Texts and Hegemony

There are many topics under the study of media texts and all cannot be covered here. We will focus on consumerism, identity and the public sphere.

(I) The Media and the Hegemony of Consumerism

Consumerism emerged and grew in China in complicated conditions, politically, economically and culturally. Market economy took shape and began to boom in China in the early 1990s. Since then, people have expected more to be consumed, as material products keep growing in number and variety. This laid an economic foundation for consumerism in China. In a political environment comparatively relaxed, productivity got substantially improved and the national economy was greatly boosted. Chinese people began to enjoy life as they wished and their long-oppressed desires were finally liberated. They pursued a happy life and expressed themselves freely, to a large extent, through consumption. Culturally, an entertainment trend grew out of thriving mass culture, which in turn boosted the growth of consumption. In addition, as China opened its door wider to the outside world, the global trend of consumerism played a role in pushing forward consumerism in China. Moreover, the media fueled consumerism in China as well. It has advertised for consumerism and ridden on a trend of consumerism. This mutually causal relationship between the media and consumerism is called by someone as a “conspiracy” that definitely fuels or intensifies consumerism in China.²⁰²

(1) Media-guided/produced Consumption

One can analyze how the media guide and produce consumption on three levels, namely the purchase and consumption of specific and individual goods, the consumption of lifestyle, and the new fashion and consuming domains.²⁰³

Mass media guide people in their consumption of all sorts of specific and individual goods, from daily necessities like shampoo and batteries to clothes, food, housing and transportation. It tells consumers what to buy and what to discard and trumpets certain brands. Television programs on the shopping channels epitomize the phenomenon.

The adoption of a lifestyle goes beyond the consumption of specific types of goods. It relates a certain product to the habits and mentality of certain social groups

²⁰¹Xiong Hao, “The Centennial Anniversary of Peking University: The Analysis of a Cultural Event” in Tao Dongfeng et al. (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (Vol. II) (Tianjin: Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2001), p. 187.

²⁰²Xu Xiaoli, “A Study of Consumption Culture in China’s Media since the 1990s”, a doctoral dissertation, Wuhan University, 2006.

²⁰³Jiang Yuanlun, *Media Culture and the Era of Consumption* (Beijing: Central Compilation & Translation Press, 2004), p. 134.

or classes (usually those who have achieved great success in life), as if ownership of the product is mark of one's adoption of some distinct lifestyle. The product is given a symbolic significance in addition to its original use value. Consumption of commodities then turns into that of symbols. Advertisements that relate the consumption of certain goods to those who have made it are ubiquitous. According to Tao Dongfeng, these ads fabricate the story of a man of "success" in a few seconds and "constructs" the prototype of a man of "success": He is 35–45 years old, slightly plump, in ruddy health and accompanied by a beauty in his own house and car. Tao points out that the story of a man of success never includes details about how he/she achieved that success. The success is a legendary accomplishment at one stroke. What's worse, the symbol of success is not spiritual, but material, i.e. a person's possession of luxury consumer goods.²⁰⁴

Also, the media deliberately open new consumption domains and encourage the masses to go there. In this way, a new consumption pattern and even lifestyle is produced, which boosts the sale of related goods, in turn. For instance, the so-called BOBOs (a group in a bourgeoisie and Bohemian style) are actually a consumer behavior or lifestyle trumpeted by mass media.²⁰⁵

(2) The Media Riding on a Trend of Consumerism

From the early 1990s onwards, reform and opening-up keeps advancing in China and market economy develops fast around the globe. The media guide and fuel consumerism, while they ride on a trend of consumerism as well, in the content and form of communication.

The media ride on consumerism, as there are more commercials. For example, advertisements used to be found in a corner or between two pages. Later, a whole page would be dedicated to commercials. And now, one finds an advertising pamphlet attached to a newspaper. Advertisements get more important. Many editors are trying to assert more advertisements without impeding readers' reading experience. Advertisements even become a part of reading experience for some. TV commercials seem to be everywhere whenever one turns on the television. In addition, entertainment news and programs are in a huge number as never before. There are specialized entertainment periodicals and channels. The public is thus constantly encouraged to consume material and entertainment commodities.

The consumption-oriented media try every means to stress "merchantability" of the content by seeking and creating "selling points" of news or through press speculation. Media texts are changed into color pages, numerous photos and eye-catching headers, for stronger visual impacts, to stimulate people's desire of consumption. News is reported in various ways, to encourage audience to purchase through the media's charming narratives.

²⁰⁴Tao Dongfeng, "A Cultural Interpretation to Advertisements", *Journal of Capital Normal University*, 2001 (6).

²⁰⁵Cheng Wenchao, "Sneakers and the Power Relations Hidden in Popular Culture" in Tao Dongfeng et al. (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (Vol. III), Tianjin: Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2002.

In a word, the media strive to shape and satisfy people's desires for material and cultural consumption by way of content and form of communication. In a modern society, media products are special consumer goods like food and an indispensable "basic living subsistence".²⁰⁶

(3) Criticism of Consumption-oriented Media

As was discussed above, the media trumpet consumption culture and consumerism and go toward something consumption-oriented. The two trends are interdependent on and interrelate to each other, "as there is a causal relationship between the two. Driven by profits, the media release advertisements in huge numbers and trumpet in all sorts of contents consumerist values and lifestyle to boost consumption of goods, catering to advertisers and sponsors. Meanwhile, the profits-pursuing media produce more and more low-cost, low-risk and profitable contents of entertainment and consumption warmly received by the masses, so that media culture takes on a strong sense of consumerism."²⁰⁷ Some scholars see the relationship between the media and consumerism as "a conspiracy".²⁰⁸ Mass media win a larger audience by trumpeting consumerism; in turn, consumerism gets further rooted in people's mind.

The media and consumption conspire around the globe. Their conspiracy in China is a political thing, however; that is, the state-controlled media in China follow the survival principle "to pursue the maximum economic profits and the minimum political risk"²⁰⁹ by working hand in hand with consumption. A scholar points out that the state power imposes a strict surveillance over the media and takes a laissez-faire policy for the latter concerning economic things. An unwritten rule goes prevalent: The media do their job within the safe boundaries concerning political issues. To do nothing is much wiser than to express true ideas. To be the watchdog with the sense of social responsibility is not that easy or profitable as to cater to market demands. The media further turn away from political concerns to consumption domains. Even the ones that were previously run with the sense of social responsibility and vision shift to audience and market, pursuing economic profits easier to be gained in the current political and economic conditions, let alone those who have been always keen on economic issues.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶Liu Weihong, "On Mass Media and Consumerism", a master's thesis, Hunan Normal University, 2005. Also see Xu Xiaoli & Qin Zhixi, "Mass Media and Expanding Consumerism", *China Press Journal*, 19 December 2007.

²⁰⁷Qin Zhixi et al., *Perspective on Media Culture* (Wuhan: Wuhan University Press, 2010), p. 9.

²⁰⁸Cai Qi & Liu Weihong, "On the Conspiracy Between the Media and Consumerism in a Media-exposed Society", *Today's Mass Media*, 2005 (2).

²⁰⁹Ling Yan, *The Visible and the Invisible: A Study of Television Culture in China from the 1990 s Onwards* (Beijing: Beijing Broadcasting Institute Press, 2006), p. 8.

²¹⁰Xu Xiaoli, "A Study of Consumption Culture in China's Media since the 1990 s", a doctoral dissertation, Wuhan University, 2006.

The alliance of the media and consumerism has been basically criticized. As Wang Yuechuan²¹¹ and others put it, the media stipulate consumption by producing various desires, so that the masses receive and accept unconsciously the consumerist values and ideology the media instill into their mind in a false harmony. The media and consumption co-establish a new cultural hegemony in their conspiracy, to control people and deprive the public of their freedom and autonomy.

However, is consumption culture totally negative in the Chinese context? Scholars' opinions diverge here. As early as in the discussion of mass culture and humanism in the early and middle 1990s there were scholars (such as Li Zehou and Wang Meng) who held a positive view on the role of consumption culture in promoting cultural diversities and eliminating dominant ideology. Tao Dongfeng confirms the positive role of parody literature in diminishing the power of orthodox authority. Lei Qili makes in *Illusions of the Media* an analysis of how the fashion magazine *Creativity* consumes Ché Guevara "the cool man": In a context of consumerism, Guevara is moved from the elite discourse through "the folk" to the mass discourse and from the historical discourse through the current context to the consumption discourse, so that "the 'sublime' and 'divine' 'Utopia' in the traditional ideology gets further deconstructed".²¹² Nonetheless, what values shall we establish when divinity, sublimity and taboos are removed by consumption? So Lei also points that as Ché Guevara "the cool man" is consumed, "Guevara becomes an abstract legendary 'cool man' who is charismatic behind stories". Guevara and his revolutionary spirit are terribly reduced to nothing by consumption.²¹³ Dai Jinhua gets to the point in her concerns.

This is an era entangling with the decaying and the newly-born. Time and again, people remove taboos and divinity and consume memories and ideologies in numerous ways of consumption and entertainment. A future rid of unbearable burdens may be delightfully. A vista free from the official control may be pleasant. But does an era without any taboos or reverence necessarily embrace a paradise?²¹⁴

(II) The Media and the National Identity

Identity issue is a key topic in Cultural Studies. Identity is constructed under or with the power and the media serve as an important way. This section focuses on how the national identity is constructed in the media.²¹⁵

²¹¹Wang Yuechuan (ed.), *Media Philosophy: An Introduction* (Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 2004), p. 17.

²¹²Lei Qili, *Illusions of the Media: An Analysis of Modern Life and Media Culture* (Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 2008), p. 53.

²¹³Ibid.

²¹⁴Wang Yuechuan (ed.), *Media Philosophy: An Introduction* (Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 2004), p. 78.

²¹⁵As for how the image of women is constructed in the media, refer to "Chap. 5 Feminism and Gender Issues".

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Wu Ruiren [trans.], Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2005) has been considered as the key theory of the national identity. Anderson sees nation, nationality and nationalism as "distinct cultural artifacts" and defines a nation as "an imagined community". The media play a critical role in people's imagination of this community. Usually, the media arouse a universal feeling among the people by leading their attention to certain events or figures, to build "an imagined community" in the people's mind to create a sense of identification and belonging. The media often examine a certain event in a time-space framework of binary oppositions, comparing the past and the present and even the future and making comparison between the self and the others (other nations). In this way, a national community is created in the media.

One may find the binary opposition framework in many media events. A scholar points out that "Xinwen Lianbo", a news program of China Central Television (CCTV) prefers a binary opposition structure of China and the world, "domestic news reports about 'China' are deliberately prepared in a fixed pattern, while the press coverage about the international issues talks largely about local wars or disturbances, natural or manmade disasters, changes of governments, economic fluctuations and weak control, or the latest scientific and technological outcomes, literary and art news and anecdotes."²¹⁶ Thus, China seems to be the most stable and peaceful country in the best order in the world. The binary opposition narrative is the most commonly-seen one in TV series and films as well.

In addition to the above-described time-space framework of binary opposition, the media tend, in the coverage of a particular event like a disaster or national celebration, to construct family-state cohesion of unity,²¹⁷ for an image of the national harmony. Some scholar examines the press coverage of the Wenchuan Earthquake and points out that the media often built a binary opposition framework like "victims of the calamity/non-victims" and "victims of the calamity/the nation". Mutual help and unity were highlighted within such a framework: Non-victims donated to help victims and the government showed great concerns for those who suffered from the disaster. In turn, victims held gratitude toward those who gave their hands and toward the government. The state, the nation and volunteers felt a strong sense of identity in the powerful cohesion. The image of a unified and harmonious nation was represented to people.²¹⁸ Moreover, the media "crowned" Premier Wen Jiabao as "a star", through whom the cohesion of the nation/people became an integral part of an imagined community. People showed their recognition of the premier in a way they treat a pop star.

²¹⁶Wang Yuwei, *The Discourse of Nationalism and the Television Culture in China* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2011), pp. 99–100.

²¹⁷See Wang Yuwei, *The Discourse of Nationalism and the Television Culture in China* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2011), pp. 94–97.

²¹⁸Li Chunxia, "Disasters, Media Rites and the State", *Guizhou Social Sciences*, 2008 (6).

In the press coverage of a celebration, the media often illustrate the image of a harmonious, unified, strong and promising nation in a festive atmosphere enveloping the entire country.²¹⁹ The Spring Festival Gala may be the epitome of media rites highlighting the national unity. We'll give no unnecessary details here, as many other articles and books have made full descriptions of this.²²⁰

A live telecast represents symbols and icons in combinations, so that the audience immerse themselves in the represented correlations between the symbols and icons and share a common value. Thanks to this shared value, the audience unite into a spiritual "community" and the social order gets well maintained and consolidated.²²¹ In the meanwhile, anything unaccepted by the government-approved ideology is forgotten by the imagined construction of the nation. It is a mission of Cultural Studies to revive or rediscover the forgotten parts of history.²²²

(III) New Media and the Public Sphere

The discussion about the media and the public sphere has kept on in the past three decades since the reform and opening-up of China,²²³ on the issues such as how to define the boundary between the public and private spheres, how to build the public sphere in the media, and how to examine the hidden power relations. This section investigates the discussion about the media and the public sphere, focusing on new media²²⁴ that plays a critical role in building the public sphere.

²¹⁹Zeng Yiguo, "Media Rites and the National Identity: An Analysis of the CCTV's Live Telecast of the Celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China", *TV Research*, 2009 (12).

²²⁰See Lv Xinyu, "An Analysis of the Spring Festival Gala 2002", *Dushu (Reading)*, 2003 (1); Lv Xinyu, "Rites, Television and the National Ideology: An Analysis of the Spring Festival Gala 2006", *Collection of Papers on China Communication Forum 2006* (Vol.I); Jin Yuping, "The National Identity in the Media: A Case Study of the Spring Festival Galas", *Theory Horizon*, 2010 (1); Zhu Lili, "The National Discourse, Remarkable Visual Spectacles and Consumerism: the Representations and Communication in the Spring Festival Gala 2010", *The Journal of Jiangsu Administration Institute*, 2010 (4); and Li Jing, "A Gala and the Imagined Community of Nation: A Case Study of the Spring Festival Gala 2009", *News World*, 2009 (7).

²²¹Yu Qian, "How a Media Rite Is Represented in the Live Television: A Case Study of the CCTV's Live Telecast of the Celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China", *Southeast Communication*, 2010 (2).

²²²See the articles in "Cultural Memory: the West and China" in Tao Dongfeng (ed.), *Cultural Studies* (Vol. 11), Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2011.

²²³See Huang Yueqin, "How the Idea of 'Public Sphere' Is Applied to Media Studies in China: A Reflection on Paradigms and Paths", *Journal of Hubei University*, 2009 (6); and Huang Yueqin, "The Public Sphere and the Study of Mass Media in the Context of Reform", *Southeast Communication*, 2010 (5).

²²⁴"New media" doesn't refer to certain forms of media. As for its definition, see Yu Guoming, "Key Words of the New Media", *Advertising Panorama*, 2006 (5); Wei Lijin, "New Media: A Relative Concept", *Advertising Panorama*, 2006 (6); Kuang Wenbo, "What Is New Media?", *News and Writing*, 2012 (7); and Kuang Wenbo, "Clearly-defined Core Ideas of New Media", *Journalism Lover*, 2012 (19).

(1) The Public's New Media

Many scholars hold an optimistic view of new media that it is likely to be an ideal public sphere in China or “further develop into Habermas’s ‘ideal public sphere’”²²⁵; or, at least, new media may take on what the public sphere should look like in Habermas’s mind.²²⁶ For example, according to some certain scholar, information is not released from the only “point” on blog, so every individual is a potential “point” to release information; therefore, “when innumerable ‘points’ finally form an entire ‘surface’ on Internet, this ‘surface’ would be the true public sphere in a society independent of the state”.²²⁷ During the process where “points” are linked into the “surface”, all the members of a society take an active role. The previous onlookers turn into passionate participants. The public express their opinions and have a say about their rights by clicking the mouse, to repost, share, follow and reply microblogs. The seemingly scattered clicks accumulate into a power and play a significant role in witnessing and participating in the onlooker’s politics. In the Weibo (a Chinese microblogging website) space, the power finally develops into a nationwide public sphere crossing regions and classes.²²⁸

The interactive new media create a public platform for information sharing. People are free to express their opinions on public issues and hold discussions. It is a public sphere then. In addition, the fragmented new media diminishes the power of “center” and the privilege possessed by old-day “authority” in communication. Information is freely released and opinions fully expressed in new media and it is possible to build a public sphere here.

Many scholars see new media as a possible domain for the ideal public sphere. However, it remains for discussion whether this public sphere can be built in an easy way and whether “a carefree transformation” is possible between individuals, audience and the public. Despite an optimistic view of the public’s new media, scholars also see the restraints deep behind the public sphere building imposed on it by various powers. The public’s new media is evidently some place filled with complexities.

(2) Complicated Issues in Building the Public Sphere in New Media

According to some scholar, the public sphere today, the media where the public opinions are expressed included, are entangled with too complicated power

²²⁵Zheng Dawei, “Expanded Information Sources and the Current Online Public Sphere”, *Contemporary Communications*, 2005 (3).

²²⁶Xu Guang, “Subversion or Reconstruction: the Blog Study in Communication”, a master’s thesis, Jinan University, 2006.

²²⁷Yan Chunjun, “Blogs and the Era of the Personal Media”, *Fujian Tribune (The Humanities & Social Sciences Bimonthly)*, 2003 (3).

²²⁸Qi Zhihui, “A Study of Microblogs Based on Spatial Theory”, a master’s thesis, Jinan University, 2012.

relations; thus, it is necessary “to wake up from the illusion that mass media could be unrestrained.”²²⁹ Those entangled power relations are seen in politics, economy and individuals’ public awareness.

First of all, in the Chinese mainland the political power usually exerts its influence on the press coverage. “The media power in China remains affiliated to the political-cultural system unique to China. It is impossible to fully examine the abnormal media power, without an in-depth analysis of the political-cultural system”.²³⁰ The political power may convey special powers to the media and be able to eliminate any media content that refuses its control. Moreover, strong market forces hold a rein over the public media. The media may fall as potential commercial resources on sale.²³¹

The media have been much less public, due to the restraints from the political and economic powers. The public may concern about this issue for a while or simply for fun. There is no continuous public reason in China. In actuality, the stronger the government control gets, the more fun the public are seeking and the more urgent they feel to express their emotions. The seemingly passionate concern about the public issues is never a rational one. Some scholar warns, “We are over optimistic about the so-called enhancing public concerns.”²³²

4. Audience Study

(I) Paradigms of the Audience Study

Theories used in audience study in China are mainly from the West. McQuail’s classification of audiences into “structural”, “behavioral” and “sociocultural” in his *Audience Analysis* is widely cited and generally accepted.²³³ The use of ethnographic studies as a primary paradigm in audience study, allows researchers to examine how different audience groups interpret and make sense of the media in different contexts. We must realize, however, that these paradigms do not stand as polar opposites to one another. Cultural Studies often borrows the methodologies and research outcomes from the former two which have, in addition to data survey and analysis, also been engaging in critical thinking, something that is inherent to Cultural Studies.

²²⁹Nanfan, “Advertising and Rhetoric of Desires” in Wang Yuechuan (ed.), *Media Philosophy* (Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 2004), p. 82.

²³⁰Tao Dongfeng, “Mass Communication, Democratic Politics and the Public Sphere” in Wang Yuechuan (ed.), *Media Philosophy* (Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 2004), p. 139.

²³¹Nanfan, “Advertising and Rhetoric of Desires” in Wang Yuechuan (ed.), *Media Philosophy* (Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 2004), p. 83.

²³²Chang Kai, “From ‘Plaza’ to ‘Weibo’: the Public Concern in the Era of New Media”, *Theory Horizon*, 2012 (10).

²³³McQuail, Denis, *Audience Analysis*, Liu Yannan et al. (trans.) (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2006), pp. 23–24.

Audience study in China started in the early 1980s.²³⁴ Chinese academics have focused mostly on the relationship between the media and the audience, and the latter's media behaviors (methods of access and use pattern), their media needs and mentality, which are in McQuail's classification, structural and behavioral aspects of the audience, which are typically studied either using measurements or by looking at the actual experiences and results of media exposure. By comparison, the study of the cultural aspects of an audience, which would be done primarily through sociocultural studies based on acceptance analysis is relatively underdeveloped.²³⁵ We'll examine how audience study in modern China learned from the Western audience theories and its analysis of the audience (of new media) and interprets the complicated media.²³⁶

(II) New Features of the Audience of the New Media

The audience of new media show some new features. First, the audience tend to split up or get fragmented. In another word, they turn to more media resources, including Internet and smart phones, as there are more diversified media products when the media tend to be further specialized. The number of audience in a specialized medium decreases, even if the absolute number of total audience remains constant. That's the "split-up" or "fragmentation" of audience.²³⁷ In the meantime, social strata keep splitting up and audience are no longer a homogeneous entirety; instead, they split up into different social strata and a same or similar stratum would further split up into various substrata.²³⁸ Secondly, audience show diversified personalities and stronger initiative, as they are able to choose what they like, be it the media form or content. Some say that a "one-person audience" era is coming when the media serves individuals and every individual user may choose the content to his own likes, maybe with a personalized program list. Thirdly, audience participate in and interactive with the media in a more active manner. The audience of new media is both the receiver and the communicator. The original information is widely spread, as the audience get involved in the media activities by reposting, remarking and sharing the information. The information multiplies in the media, as

²³⁴See Chen Chongshan, "Twenty Years of the Audience Study in China" and "On the Precedence of Audience" in CASS Institute of Journalism and School of Journalism and Communication, Hebei University (eds.), *Audience Analysis: Attitudes, Methods and Market—Papers on the Third National Symposium on the Audience Study*, Baoding: Hebei University Press, 2001.

²³⁵Xing Hongwen, *Television, Audience and Identity: An Empirical Study in Shanghai* (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press, 2013), pp. 6–7.

²³⁶For more detailed descriptions and analysis of the audience study (that in China included), see Zeng Wenli & Tan Xiuhu, *A Study of the Audience's Discursive Power in China's Entertainment TV Programs* (Beijing: China Radio Film & TV Press, 2012), pp. 13–32.

²³⁷Ren Fei, "A Preliminary Study of the Internet Audience", *Dongyue Tribune*, 2012 (6).

²³⁸See Zhou Aiqun & Hu Yiqing, *Theories and Practice of the Audience Study* (Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Publishing House, 2005), p. 13.

virus does. Thus, the audience of new media are also known as “viral audience”.²³⁹ Fourthly, audience show a stronger awareness of the public concerns. Some even see new media as a starting point for public intellectuals to regain their subjectivity. The public may express and spread on Internet what they think at a low cost and anonymously. Therefore, they act as the spokesmen of their own. Any individual user is able to complete the information dissemination process all by himself. It is no longer the job of a certain institute to edit a message, make channel analysis, release a message or give comments. Furthermore, information is released in a real-time manner and people speak out their personal feelings about a public event. It is just what a conventional public sphere may be like, “to have the public talk about their feelings independent of any authority’s control”. Moreover, the rising “digital public sphere” hits hard the single-center pattern in the era of mass media and the discursive power pattern gets changed accordingly. The public sphere that is losing its ground in the conventional areas now sees a possibility of rejuvenation in the cyber world.

(III) Ethnography as a Tool in Audience Study

Ethnography has long been an important research methodology in audience study and Cultural Studies in the West. It was not adopted by those doing research on audience study in modern China until fairly recently, which explains the limited number of representative publications in the field so far.²⁴⁰ Limited too is its scope (confined to the study of television and rural audience). There are even fewer ethnographic studies of the impact of gender, race and cultural identity. Ethnographic audience study in China has still a long way to go.

There are, however, a number of worthy works that deserve a closer look.

Li Yayu published “‘Xinwen Lianbo’ and Peasants’ Daily Life: An Ethnographic Study Conducted in Y Village in Hunan Province” in *Southeast Communication*, 2010 (3). The author examines villagers’ assessment of “Xinwen Lianbo”, the CCTV’s nightly news program and categorizes their reasons into four types. For the group of villagers in Y Village that watches “Xinwen Lianbo” as a nightly ritual, the experience has become an integral part of their life, even though they may not fully understand everything in the program. This routine gives villagers a sense of belonging, dignity, self-respect and even happiness. A second

²³⁹Han Enhua & Zhou Ziyuan, “New Features of the Audience in the New Media Context”, *Journalism Lover*, 2011 (7).

²⁴⁰See Guo Jianbin, *Television in Lonely Villages: Modern Media and the Daily Life in Villages of Ethnic Minorities*, Jinan: Shandong People’s Publishing House, 2005; Li Chunxia, *Television and the Life of the Yi People*, Chengdu: Sichuan University Press, 2007; Wu Fei, *Fire Pits, Church and Television: A Study of the Social Communication Network in an Ethnic Community*, Beijing: Guangming Daily Press, 2008; Liu Rui, “The Impacts of Television on the Social Mobility in the Rural Areas in West China: An Ethnographic Survey Conducted in the Shilan Village of Enshi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture”, *Journalism and Communication*, 2010 (1); and Yuan Song and Zhang Yueying, “Television and Village Politics: A Sociological Study of Communication Conducted in the Fu Village in Central Henan Province”, *Journalism and Communication Review*, Vol. 2010.

group of villagers, mostly females, watch the news program not so much because they are interested in it themselves but because they “happen to be there when their husbands are watching it”. It is a sort of (patriarchal) parlor politics. A third group of villagers learn about how the government operates and what happens internationally, and use this knowledge to shape their own ideas of politics in their daily life. For instance, their awareness of certain policies may come in handy in their dealings with local officials and efforts to safeguard their own rights and interests. Similar analysis is given in the article by Yuan Song and Zhang Yueying titled “Television and Village Politics: A Sociological Study of Communication Conducted in the Fu Village in Central Henan Province” published in *Journalism and Communication Review* in 2010.

For the fourth group of villagers, watching “Xinwen Lianbo” supplies them with conversation topics. The program informs them about current affairs.

Li further points out that none of the four reasons for watching the program corresponds with a signal group of people. Indeed, any one individual may watch the program for a combination of different reasons, though possibly of varying strengths. These four reasons for watching indicate that the experience offers a combination of patriarchy, the Party leadership and state power: They accept the program’s underlying ideology and enter into a state-dominated ritual field, identifying themselves with the Central Government, accepting its legitimacy. It is in essence a kind of worship toward the political authority and a natural product of the national ideology and one-party politics. It is not hard to understand, therefore, why ‘Xinwen Lianbo’ has a considerable number of loyal viewers in rural areas, many of whom exhibiting what might be called “Xinwen Lianbo Complex”.

In the meantime, the villagers reprocess what they receive from “Xinwen Lianbo” and enjoy the happiness of initiative activities. Their interpretation may have nothing to do with “Xinwen Lianbo” itself and is only something for chats. Some villagers may have their own understanding of the program and form their own values and standpoints. “Quite limited”, such an interpretation shows the villagers’ self-consciousness, though.

The author points that, in the social transition, the national ideology closely connects to rural communities by way of the mass media. It controls through local cultures and creates a harmonious “vision of the nation”. However, the control is diminishing, as rural communities keep progressing. With a stronger self-consciousness, grassroots peasants culturally rebel against the national ideology. The hegemony-antagonism interpretation is also found in many other ethnographic studies, more or less.

In her “Television Program Language and the Audience’s Identity: An Ethnographic Survey Conducted in the Tuotai Village” (published in *Chinese Journal of Journalism & Communication*, 2012 [10]), Jin Yuping examines how the Uyghur audience construct their ethnic identity through watching TV programs. Hong Changhui investigates the impacts of television on villagers in “Television and the Rural Daily Life” (a master’s thesis, Xiamen University, 2008). In her “The Yi People and Television: An Ethnographic Study of the Relationship Between

Television and Daily Life in a Village of the Yi People” (published in *Thinking*, 2005 [5]),²⁴¹ Li Chunxia examines the relationship between television and the local Yi people in Caobazi. Yuan Song and Zhang Yueying, in their article “Television and Village Politics: A Sociological Study of Communication Conducted in the Fu Village in Central Henan Province” (published in *Journalism and Communication Review*, Vol. 2010), give their critical thoughts on the television-based village politics, from the angle of the relations between traditions and modernity, and between the Central Government and local authorities. Those are remarkable outcomes of the ethnography-based media studies.

6 Study of the Urban Space

The study of the urban space is mainly conducted in two ways. Empirical studies aim to discover the innate rules and “build harmonious cities”,²⁴² by way of questionnaires or related urban censuses. Critical studies focus on how the space is created, the powers involved in the process, the games between those powers and the outcomes of space production. The latter belongs to Cultural Studies and is the focus of this chapter.

1. History of Spatial Studies in Modern China

(I) The Emergence of Spatial Studies in Modern China

Spatial studies rose in modern China, as in practice, issues, particularly the negative ones, emerge when the urban development fast advances in the country, while the spatial theories are introduced from the West, laying a theoretical foundation.

- (1) In practice, China has seen an urbanization process “forward in great leaps” since the early 1990s, leading to new and significant changes in the form and structure of the urban space.²⁴³ One of the key changes lies in the turn from “the production of material objects in a space” to “space production” itself. Space in the urban development in modern days is no longer simply a static “container” of objects or dwellers. It becomes a critical and even scarce resource different powers are struggling for. Space is an indicator of changing social relations. In the meantime, the fast urban development has produced quite a number of negative consequences, such as pollution, ecological deterioration and the conflicts between dwellers and developers/government in

²⁴¹The article is part of Li’s doctoral dissertation that is later published under the title *Television and the Life of the Yi People*, Chengdu: Sichuan University Press, 2007.

²⁴²See Li Zhigang & Gu Chaolin, *The Structural Transformation of the Social Space in China’s Cities* (Nanjing: Southeast University Press, 2011), Chap. 11.

²⁴³There are many monographs and articles on the structural changes in the urban space in China. See Li Zhigang & Gu Chaolin, *The Structural Transformation of the Social Space in China’s Cities*, Nanjing: Southeast University Press, 2011.

urban redevelopment/demolition projects. People get more concerned about spatial issues.

- (2) Spatial theories introduced from the West have played an active role in promoting spatial studies in modern China. Western scholars have long been engaged in spatial studies. A trend known as “the spatial turn” was put forth in the 1970s by Henri Lefebvre, Foucault, David Harvey and Edward W. Soja. Spatial studies in modern China has been basically based on the thoughts and theories of the aforementioned scholars, particularly Lefebvre’s.²⁴⁴

The Western spatial theories were largely first introduced to China after 2000 and reached a climax around 2005, as the urban development hadn’t been fully launched until then. Thus, the spatial theories that have been in use for decades in the West were introduced to China in quite short a time, as the cities in China began to ride on a fast-forward development. The spatial theory thus witnesses a fast development in China, while the Western theories have been mechanically copied and reproduced.

(II) An Overview of the Spatial Studies in Modern China

The Chinese academics paid attention to the issues concerning the urban space from the 1990s onwards. Nonetheless, there was no “turn” in their study or concern at the beginning. The study was mainly conducted in areas such as geography and urban sociology.²⁴⁵ A wave of the theory of the urban space production emerged after 2000, including the specialized studies of Lefebvre, Harvey and other Western spatial theorists,²⁴⁶ as well as the general study of the spatial theory and the research in related fields.

²⁴⁴Lefebvre has been known for his masterpiece *The Production of Space* first published in 1974. However, a cover-to-cover Chinese version is yet to be completed. The Chinese translation of selected parts was published in 2005. Lefebvre’s *Space and Politics* hadn’t been translated into Chinese until 2008 (Li Chun [trans.], Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Publishing House). Other Western works translated include Foucault’s “Geography of Power” in Foucault’s *Eyes of Power* (Yan Feng [trans.], Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 1997); Foucault’s “Texts and Contexts of Different Spaces”, “Other Spaces” and “Space, Knowledge and Power” in Bao Yaming (ed.), *Postmodernity and Geopolitics*, Shanghai: Shanghai Education Press, 2001. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2003; Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2006; and Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 2010. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, Wang Wenbin (trans.), Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2004; Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Shanghai: Shanghai Education Press, 2005; and Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*, Li Jun et al. (trans.), Shanghai: Shanghai Education Press, 2006.

²⁴⁵Xia Jianzhong, “Major Theories of New Urban Sociology”, *Sociological Studies*, 1998 (4).

²⁴⁶Such as Liu Huaiyu, *Mediocre and Legendary Modernity: A Textual Interpretation of Lefebvre’s Critique of Everyday Life*, Beijing: Central Compilation & Translation Press, 2006; Wu Ning, *The Critique of Everyday Life: A Study of Lefebvre’s Philosophy*, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2007; Zhang Zikai, “A Study of Lefebvre’s Thought of ‘Social Space’”, a doctoral dissertation, Peking University, 2008; Cui Lihua, “A Study of David Harvey’s Critical Theory of Space”, a doctoral dissertation, Beijing Normal University, 2011; and Tang Xuchang,

In addition to theses and books on the spatial studies, there are some collected papers, collected translations or readers. The ones published by the Urban Culture Center²⁴⁷ of Shanghai Normal University may be the representative ones of the kind, namely “Cities and Culture” (collected papers), “Urban Culture Study” (collected papers), “Collected Translated Works on Cities and Culture” and “Collected Translated Works on Urban Culture Study”. Not entirely about the spatial studies, all those collected papers and translated works talk about the issues of space. There are even special topics in them concerning the spatial studies. Those publications have played a critical role in promoting the spatial studies in China.

Collected papers and readers on the spatial studies also include *The Urban Culture Studies Reader* (four volumes, Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008) edited by Xue Yi, *The City Culture Studies: A Reader* (Peking University Press, 2008) edited by Wang Min'an et al. and *Metropolitan Culture Research in China* (Shanghai People's Publishing House) edited by Hu Huilin et al. In addition, Vol. 10 and Vol. 15 in *Cultural Studies* co-edited by Tao Dongfeng and Zhou Xian both talk about the spatial studies and the urban culture study remains as a regular topic in the collection. Some other collected papers include *Urban Cultural Studies* and *China Urban Review*.

The urban space issue is now a hot academic topic in China. The interdisciplinary spatial studies covers fields of geography, philosophy, sociology and culturology and there is a long way to go to make substantial outcomes in China (as the spatial studies in China relies upon the Western theories nowadays).

2. The Study of the Political Space

We'll examine the studies of the political, consumption and public spaces in modern China in the following sections. Such a classification may not an absolute one, as the public and consumption spaces are always political ones. A space can be a political one or a public one for consumption.

(I) The State Power-dominated Production of the Political Space

A political space is produced to express political ideas. Political spaces are never uncommon in China, with Tiananmen Square as the representative that is a completely political space (or a politically-significant public space). Chang-tai Hung, a Hong Kong-based scholar investigates the reconstruction and expansion of Tiananmen Square and shows how the Communist Party of China (CPC) fit the production of this political space into its political considerations.²⁴⁸

(Footnote 246 continued)

“A Study of David Harvey's Thought of the Urban Space: An Investigation Based on Marxist Political Economy”, a doctoral dissertation, China Renmin University, 2011; and etc.

²⁴⁷The center was established in 1998 and the E-Institute of Urban Culture was set up in 2002. In 2004, the center became a key research institute of the humanities in university approved by the Ministry of Education.

²⁴⁸Chang-tai Hung, “Space and Politics: the Expansion of the Tiananmen Square”, *Cold War International History Studies* (2007).

Hung finds three powers in the reconstruction and expansion of Tiananmen Square, namely the CPC and its government, the Chinese architects working for the government and the Soviet Union architects. The CPC finally got the upper hand in the games and built Tiananmen Square as a standard political space. Establishing its own regime, the Party constructed a new socialist system in China and new political spaces across the country. Beijing and Tiananmen Square in particular, as the landmark political space in China, required meticulous planning. The CPC actually started the planning for Beijing before the founding of the People's Republic of China. An Urban Planning Commission of Beijing was set up, with Liang Sicheng the famous architect sitting in the commission's standing committee. Liang strongly advocated preserving the ancient architecture and cultural relics in the city proper and building a new cultural/political center in the western suburbs. However, Liang's plan was opposed and criticized by the Party and architectural circles. Some held that it was economically impractical to build a new area outside the city proper, as the new government faced financial constraints at the time. Also, Liang's plan didn't fit the Party's political considerations. The Central Committee of the CPC had set a strategy well before the founding of the People's Republic of China "to change cities of consumption to the ones of production". Thus, in addition to a political and cultural center, Beijing would be built into an industrial center as well. This strategy reflected the important status the working class occupied back then and fit the political agenda and purpose.

Furthermore, the CPC attached great significance to its new administrative center in the old city proper of Beijing. The new regime hoped to consolidate its legitimacy in this way and took the site as the symbol of a promising future China would have under the leadership of the CPC. Therefore, it had been the CPC's plan to build its political center in the old city proper of Beijing, with Tiananmen Square at the center. Liang Sicheng went against the Party's design and political considerations by proposing to build the political center in a new area in Beijing, merely out of the consideration of protecting and preserving the cultural relics.

Liang Sicheng had to face fiercer criticism when the Soviet Union experts got involved. Numerous groups of Soviet experts came to China and worked in the planning and construction of Beijing and Tiananmen Square from mid-September 1949 when the first ones arrived in Beijing (present-day Beijing) to the day when the Sino-Soviet Split took place. Soviet experts introduced and followed the planning pattern for Moscow and the Red Square and proposed that the political center of the People's Republic of China be located in the old city proper of Beijing and Tiananmen Square expanded into a venue for national ceremonies and military or public parades, as the Red Square in Moscow was. This plan was evidently agreeable to the CPC leadership. However, the Soviet experts had disputes with the CPC over how large Tiananmen Square should be and how wide the Chang'an Boulevard should be. As China and the Soviet Union fell out with each other, the disputes deteriorated into an issue concerning national dignity. Finally, Tiananmen Square and the Chang'an Boulevard both were substantially expanded, made possible only with the demolition of a large number of surrounding buildings.

Tiananmen Square is much larger than the Red Square and the Chang'an Boulevard is much wider than any road around the Red Square.

Anyway, the reconstruction and expansion of Tiananmen Square was never a simple construction project; instead, it was a political event. The CPC consolidated its legitimacy and declared China's sovereignty through the reconstruction and expansion of the traditional sacred space in ancient China. Despite the contests among different parties during the process, the CPC prevailed in the end. "From the point of view of political history, the project demonstrated the CPC's policies, domestically (to establish and consolidate its regime) and externally (to rival the Soviet Union and imperialist powers in Europe and the U.S.)." Tiananmen Square was thus built into a typical political space.

Political authority evidently dominated in the space production in the expansion project of Tiananmen Square. However, a political space may decline or even be diverted or reconstructed for other uses, to some extent, as society keeps rolling forward. In his "Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge: A Floating Signifier",²⁴⁹ Hu Daping examines the political significance the bridge used to carry and how that political significance was diverted to other uses when commercial economy surged.

According to Hu Daping, Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge was first designed and constructed for convenient transport. However, the bridge fell into an ideological signifier during the construction: It was built as an icon of the great victory of Mao Zedong Thought and the proletarian revolution. The ideological significance the bridge used to carry is still demonstrated in the four "three-red-banner" bridge-heads, four gigantic statues of workers, peasants and soldiers, eight slogans and quotations from Mao in bright-red characters, 200 cast iron reliefs depicting the construction in the early days of the People's Republic of China, as well as a huge number of sunflower-shaped ornaments and symbols of workers, peasants and soldiers. As the reform and opening-up keeps fast advancing in China, the bridge gradually lost its original political significance and even became a venue for commercial uses. For example, commercial advertisements are put up and photo-taking points are set up on the bridge. In Hu's eyes, the bridge's original ideological symbols were diverted for other uses; or, the political significance was diverted for commercial uses, indicating "a decline" of political ideology in everyday life. To put it in another way, the traditional political ideology loosened its rein and the society plagued with the highly-homogeneous revolutionary ideology tended to be open-minded.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹Tao Dongfeng & Zhou Xian (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (Vol. 10), Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2010.

²⁵⁰As for how political spaces were diverted for commercial uses, see Hu Heng's "Revolutionary History, Delight and Modernism" in Tao Dongfeng & Zhou Xian (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (Vol. 10), Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2010.

(II) Resistance in Urban Cracks

政治空间既可能会被资本所挪用或重写，甚至也可能会受到直接的挑战或抵抗，即便这种抵抗或挑战的效果是微弱的。童强、李志明等人对缝隙空间及城中村的研究正体现了这一点。

Political spaces may be op-opted or reshaped by those with capitalist might or face direct challenges or resistance, however weak, they might be. This is what Tong Qiang, Li Zhiming and some others find in their study of urban cracks and urban villages.

Tong Qiang examines the politics of urban cracks and unveils the power struggle within in “Power, Capital and Urban Cracks”.²⁵¹ According to Tong, urban cracks are an irremovable objective reality always there, so long as human beings exist and conduct social activities. Urban cracks may be physical spaces like rural-urban fringe zones, urban villages, out-of-the-way alleys, bridge openings and culverts, or diverted formal or regular spaces, such as roadside stalls and illegal construction. The author examines more the latter that is in an informal, underground and uncertain form. Not allowed by policies or laws, such a space shelters itself in street corners, between walls or behind high-rises. Spaces in this form are created easily and cancelled easily.

Tong Qiang points out that “urban cracks” are often occupied and used by the marginalized groups at the bottom of society, including non-natives, scavengers and wanderers. Unable to live on formal or relatively formal jobs, those people can hardly conduct any businesses as they wish. Thus, they have to occupy and struggle to be alive in marginalized spaces such as urban cracks and corners, where the vulnerable and marginalized at the bottom of society follow their own principle of survival: They occupy any urban cracks without supervision and give up any under surveillance. They avail themselves to any loopholes and shelter themselves to any cracks. That’s de Certeau’s partisan tactic.

The power games in the production of urban cracks are even more evident in urban villages and illegal construction within. Li Zhiming investigates, in *Space, Power and Resistance: The Spatial Politics of Illegal Construction in Urban Villages*, the power struggle in urban villages and illegal construction within. He sees the social nature and relations in urban villages that are actually a particular form of urban space. An urban village is originally a marginalized village community in a rural-urban fringe zone. The dwellers are largely the vulnerable or marginalized ones at the bottom of society, such as migrant workers and other floating people. However, as a marginalized territorial entity, an urban village occupies and seizes the marginal space it sits in. The expropriated peasants dwelling in an urban village create a special space of their own and establish the identity politics of this marginal space. In this way, the state control and authority over this marginal space gets effectively (but temporarily, though) disintegrated and the state power has lost its governance in the territory of an urban village. “This is an action

²⁵¹See Tao Dongfeng & Zhou Xian (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (Vol. 10), Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2010.

art performed by the weak to challenge the venue controlled by the powerful. It is also the true social meaning of the spatial resistance.”²⁵² Thus, an urban village is used by the powerful as a tool of power manipulation and by the weak as an arm of strategic resistance. An urban village and illegal construction within co-create an arena for power games.

3. The Study of the Consumption Space

Capital dominates the creation of a consumption space, to prioritize its commercial profits. However, the production of a consumption space may be more complicated, in which capital entangles with the state power, modernity and the masses’ resistance. Many scholars have made in-depth analyses of this.

(I) Disney-like Production of the Consumption Space

The consumption space production usually makes good use of historical and cultural resources, such as “New World” city plaza in Shanghai, “1912” Pub Street in Nanjing and many other similar consumption spaces across China. For instance, “New World” city plaza in Shanghai is built on the old neighborhood with Shanghai-style residences known as *shikumen* (stone-gated multi-storeyed terrace buildings) and “1912” Pub Street in Nanjing sits in Xinjiekou Neighborhood built with architectural complexes from the Republic of China era.

In their article “The Moulding of the Urban Consumption Space in Space Production”, Zhang Jingxiang and Deng Huayuan set out the reasons for the conversion of modern buildings with cultural significance [Translator’s note: “Modern” is a vague term in Chinese history. The timeframe of the era often varies among historians. For the purpose of this book, it refers to the period between the mid-19th century and 1949, while “contemporary” is used for the period immediately following it], such as *shikumen* (stone-gated multi-storeyed terrace buildings) and architectural complexes from the Republic of China era. First of all, the modern period is not too remote for people alive today, many of whom still retain somewhat vivid memories of the lifestyle, ethos and other physical and cultural legacies from that time. Their ability to generate in people the mixed feelings of both distance and familiarity, and both nostalgia and curiosity makes for their biggest selling point in consumption spaces; that is, their so-called “situational value”. Secondly, the old Shanghai, a potent symbol of Chinese living and culture before 1949, was almost synonymous with glamour, quality and style, exactly what the affluent urban consumers are looking for today. Developers are more than happy to capitalize on such middle-class tastes when planning out their commercial properties. Thirdly, in terms of the physical space of both architecture and cities, modern and contemporary buildings and areas tend to be reasonably well preserved in many cities. Because existing laws and regulations for the protection of cultural relics and historic cities contain no clear provisions on the protection and use of

²⁵²Li Zhiming, *Space, Power and Resistance: The Spatial Politics of Illegal Construction in Urban Villages* (Nanjing: Southeast University Press, 2009), pp. 125–126.

these structures and entities, few concrete restrictions are placed on either functional retrofit on their interior or landscape reconstruction on their exterior, giving developers considerable freedom to decide what or how to develop. Moreover, the blend of Western and Chinese styles often found in buildings from the old days in “opened-up” port cities well echoes the dual efforts today of adapting to globalization while at the same time maintaining local characters. Functional revitalization of modern urban buildings and quarters is thus widely believed to work the best for reshaping a city’s urban and cultural landscape.²⁵³

As was indicated above, culture (e.g. modern culture) has played a key role in the production of consumption spaces. However, it is no longer the historical culture in its original face; instead, it is a modified symbolic one. According to Zhang Jingxiang and Deng Huayuan, people get fascinated not by *shikumen* or architectural complexes from the Republic of China era, but by the sentiment, petty-bourgeois lifestyle and even “old romance” under literary men’s pens, behind those physical buildings. Or rather to say, those buildings are actually symbols of nostalgia. Nostalgia, as a new consuming object, links people’s memories and the reality (“Yesterday and Tomorrow Have a Date Today”—“New World” city plaza) and is further materialized into various commercial spaces, stimulating people’s desire of consumption, so that people feel temporarily freed from everyday mess, “ascending into a ritualized sacred space of joys” and walking into a surreal land of pleasure in the public urban space. Capital and culture (mined and shaped by commercial capital on purpose) “make a perfect match” in the urban space and a city becomes a surreal “Disney-like space” intertwining cultural scenes and exotic landscapes.

In addition to the culture from the era of the Republic of China, globalized scenes are also found in the production of a Disney-like space, thus an integral part of nostalgia. Be it “New World” in Shanghai or “1912” Pub Street in Nanjing, exotic restaurants, pubs, boutiques, cinemas, fitness centers and galleries with French, American, British, Italian and Japanese features seem to be everywhere in Chinese cities. Pubs and bars in Shanghai have foreigners as their target consumers from the very beginning, thus are particularly known for being exotic. Nevertheless, those pubs and bars prioritize sentiments and styles over food and beverage quality.²⁵⁴ The pub street on Hengshan Road in Shanghai, known as “the Champs Elysees in the East”, “cannot demonstrate more evidently how much a consumption space cherishes the memories of and is infatuated with exotic scenes and styles. A desire to be part of ‘globalization’ is simply too strong to be ignored.”²⁵⁵ The globalized trend of fashion and consumption dominates the production of new urban spaces and trendy followers become the target customers of the production of new urban spaces.

²⁵³Tao Dongfeng & Zhou Xian (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (Vol. 10) (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2010), pp. 28–229.

²⁵⁴Bao Yaming et al., *Bars in Shanghai: Space, Consumption and Imagination* (Nanjing: Jiangsu People’s Publishing House, 2001), p. 54.

²⁵⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 82–84.

The local/regional culture and globalized cultural scenes stand side by side, blend or “are pasted together” in space production in a postmodern manner, illusory, unreal, one-dimensional, shallow and ahistorical. Exotic styles in bars and pubs are fabricated and dislocated in the reality of Shanghai. People enjoy a sense of satisfaction, mentally or culturally, in such a fabricated atmosphere.²⁵⁶ Therefore, the production of a consumption space is never the production of material objects. It produces illusions. Food is not the only goods consumed in such a space.

(II) Resistance from Nostalgia and the Significance

Then, why consumers never feel fed up with these illusions? Why are they always ready to spend? Are the masses fully controlled in modern days? Pan Lv sees into the issues from the state-society angle and well examines the generation of nostalgia and the mass resistance hiding within: Nostalgia is not necessarily controlled. It is actually “a narrative of city life long oppressed by the state discourse.”²⁵⁷ “It is a new native way to reexpress local modernity... *Shikumen* stands out as a local expression of modernity.”²⁵⁸

According to Pan, nostalgia is not a way of looking back into history; instead, it is resistance and something that helps locate the critical voice ignored in the national narrative in modern China.²⁵⁹ Pan looks back into the history of Shanghai-style culture and how the urban space in Shanghai was shaped during Mao’s era and the early days of the reform and opening-up. The author sees *shikumen* in Shanghai as a typically local interpretation of the Western modernity: The design combining a traditional Chinese courtyard with a British-style terrace house crystallizes Shanghainese wisdom out of everyday life. *Shikumen* is an architectural icon of modernity of Shanghai as a metropolis.

Shanghai was seen as the most corrupt city in China when Mao’s era began. In a counter-urban discourse, the old-day banks, high-rises, department stores, theaters and cinemas, theme parks, apartments and *shikumen* experienced enormous subversion physically and symbolically. In the early days of the reform and opening-up, Shanghai remained left out in the cold and saw a slow development. The city began to fast develop in the “modernization” stage from the 1990s onwards, thanks to favorable policies. “*Shikumen* looked old, shabby, outdated and out of place in a blueprint of the ‘modern’ development, thus must be demolished.”²⁶⁰ This action was a natural consequence of the long-existing counter-urban discourse, due to which *shikumen* had long been in unreasonably excessive use,

²⁵⁶Ibid., p. 54.

²⁵⁷Pan Lv, “Reinterpretation of Political Nostalgia in Shanghai: Memories, Modernity and Urban Space” in Tao Dongfeng & Zhou Xian (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (Vol. 15) (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2013), p. 180.

²⁵⁸Tao Dongfeng & Zhou Xian (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (Vol. 15) (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2013), p. 186.

²⁵⁹Ibid., p. 180.

²⁶⁰Ibid., p. 186.

densely populated and without properly-installed sanitary facilities. As time flew by, *shikumen* gradually lost its value and local residents' life deteriorated.

Against such a background, the reconstruction project of *shikumen* into "New World" city plaza was warmly received by citizens (as was indicated by the author's survey). The advocates of this reconstruction project found their memories of the past well preserved and saw a sharp contrast to the shabby *shikumen* in old days. "'New World' or nostalgia in *shikumen* pursues the freshness the Western modernity has brought to locals and is a natural response to the counter-urban discourse permeating Shanghai. It is nostalgia to the local modernity." This nostalgia "frantically desires to retain the past and demonstrate the power, and in the meantime, pursues an alternative or resistant discourse."²⁶¹

Thus, consumption culture is not necessarily controlling, false or unreal. "Consumption culture may be a way to disenchant history and heal some wounds in memories, the wounds from historical trauma and oppressed expressions. The consumption of a nostalgic space is usually boosted by certain counter-memories, even though such memories may be unconscious or politically ambiguous. In Shanghai's case, the trauma of its oppressed urbanity seems to be consoled in the re-emerging consumerist waves and related narratives."²⁶² The author well examines how complicated consumption culture is and inspires us to think more about modernity and its nostalgia.

4. The Study of the Public Space

The public space is an integral part of the urban space in a city, including streets and roads, plazas and squares, parks, greenbelts, hubs and natural corridors.²⁶³ Streets and roads, plazas and squares, as well as parks are the most important ones. Public urban spaces in contemporary (and modern) China has gone through a zigzag road of development.²⁶⁴ This section, however, will leave the history of public urban spaces aside and focus on the functions and production mechanism of public spaces in China.

(I) Parks: the Public Space as the Symbol of Modernity

Parks, as an important public space in a city,²⁶⁵ "create an open space for leisure and social contacts and stand as an icon of the modern urban life, including

²⁶¹Ibid., pp. 190–191.

²⁶²Ibid., p. 192.

²⁶³The public urban space may be categorized in different ways. See Wan Suchun et al. (eds.), *Forms of Urban Space*, Beijing: Science Press, 2004.

²⁶⁴Zhou Bo, "A History of the Public Urban Space: A Study of the Changing Public Urban Space in China in the Second Half of the 20th Century", a doctoral dissertation, Sichuan University (Chengdu), 2005.

²⁶⁵As for the history of parks in China, see Li Deying, "Public Urban Space and Social Life: A Case Study of City Parks in Modern China", *Urban History Research* (Vols. 19–20), Tianjin: Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2000.

everyday schedule, leisure, lifestyle and the imagination of modern city planning and modern citizens.”²⁶⁶ In this sense, parks are a symbol of the modern urban civilization. Many scholars have investigated the generation of parks and its significance in modern China. In general, parks “were introduced to China as something of the Western modernity” during the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China era: First, the state power got involved in the design and planning of parks, indicating that the modern power went into the microscopic level and everyday life. Secondly, parks became the hub of modern cultures and civilizations. Chen Yunxi, in her “Sun Yat-sen Parks as a Symbol of Modernity”,²⁶⁷ examines the modern features of Sun Yat-sen Parks shown in space production.

According to Chen Yunxi, there were no public spaces in the true sense in ancient China. Thus, parks were the first modern public space in China. Sun Yat-sen Parks emerged in large numbers nationwide in the era of the Republic of China, indicating the expanding state power and culturally-significant ideology: (1) Sun Yat-sen Parks were in a large number and with the same name across China; (2) Those parks were usually located in important urban areas, with some right on the central axis of a city. Sun Yat-sen was portrayed into a national icon widely accepted and recognized by the entire population.

In addition, a Sun Yat-sen Park evidently features deliberately-designed symbolic architectural structures, such as the portrait of and memorial hall, monument and memorial pavilion to Sun Yat-sen. In a Sun Yat-sen Park, one always finds a Pavilion of Democracy and a Pavilion to Sun Yat-sen, as well as a copper or stone statue of Sun Yat-sen in the center of the park. The base of the statue is engraved with Sun Yat-sen’s will. Be it a portrait or statue of Sun Yat-sen, it is an effective way to intensify Sun Yat-sen’s image as an icon. Many people, the grassroots in particular, gain their first and most direct impression of Sun by paying their respect to such a statue. Furthermore, the KMT authority endeavored to represent and integrate “the Three Principles of the People” [Translator’s note: Nationalism, Democracy, the People’s Livelihood] in the space of a Sun Yat-sen Park, so that the people may have a direct idea of Sun Yat-sen’s thoughts by paying a visit to the park. The public were supposed to “get moralized” in this way. Thus, the national ideology was fully represented in a subtle manner in the deliberately-designed layout of a Sun Yat-sen Park. Such a park “was a symbol of a modern state and nation”²⁶⁸ and “mirrored modernity of China”,²⁶⁹ reflecting a wish to establish a totally new nation state.

²⁶⁶Lin Zheng, “From the Imperial Gardens to Parks: the Development of the Public Space in Beijing in the Early Republic of China Era” in Tao Dongfeng & Zhou Xian (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (Vol. 15), p. 124.

²⁶⁷Tao Dongfeng & Zhou Xian (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (Vol. 10), Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2010.

²⁶⁸Tao Dongfeng & Zhou Xian (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (Vol. 10) (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2010), p. 143.

²⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 153.

A Sun Yat-sen Park was a modern thing, also because of its role in promoting modern cultures and civilizations. One found well-facilitated basketball/tennis courts in Sun Yat-sen Parks, thanks to which the people may build good bodies and minds. Those facilities may be the materialized wish for a strong nation desired by Chinese in the national crisis in modern days. Moreover, Chinese people had a dream back then to catch up with and surpass Western countries. Therefore, the Western knowledge systems and cultures were warmly applauded and followed. A park then became the place where the Western knowledge was spread and promoted to more people. Parks were under the administration of the Ministry of Education in the Republic of China era and served as the organs of social education. A Sun Yat-sen Park, maybe small in size, accommodated libraries, zoos, museums and public education centers and were turned into the space for popular education. The in-park institutions were themselves a way to enhance the people's idea of different subjects and the public awareness. The cultural relics, exhibits, books, newspapers and periodicals housed in those institutions played a key role in spreading the modern sciences, civilizations and knowledge. Thus, the public education centers in Sun Yat-sen Parks played an active role in mass education.

Sun Yat-sen Parks emerged in large numbers nationwide in the Republic of China era when the country as a modern nation state got reunified and institutionalized. These parks well demonstrated modernity in China back then. The Chinese nation endured foreign invasion and oppression for too long a time in modern days, thus was more than eager to go out of the national crisis and establish an independent and strong nation state. The nation strived to realize this goal by following the modern Western civilizations under the spirit of enlightenment. Also, modernity of enlightenment in China was best seen in the Chinese nation's instrumental rationality under the impacts of the theory of evolution. Modernity was clearly represented in the layout of Sun Yat-sen Parks that served as a political and national disciplinary tool in the people's everyday life. Those parks marked the birth of modernity with Chinese characteristics.²⁷⁰

(II) The State- and Capital-dominated Production of the Public Space

The production of a public space in modern China has been dominated by the state and capital, the two of which usually make use of each other for their benefits. In the state- and capital-dominated public space production in modern China, the public benefits from a public space are usually taken as an excuse.

Zheng Yong illustrates the history of a town's central square in his master's thesis "Rise and Fall of 'Square'",²⁷¹ depicting how the state political power and the market capital dominated the production and changes of a public square.

The square in Zheng's article is located at the central area of the Yanhu Town in the southwestern part of Shandong Province. It used to be an opening where local

²⁷⁰Hu Junxiu & Li Yongjun, "Public Urban Space and Civil Life in Modern China: A Case Study of Sun Yat-sen Park in Hankou (1929–1949)", *Gansu Social Sciences*, 2009 (1).

²⁷¹A master's thesis, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 2010.

peasants winnowed and dried grain and piled up wheat straws and cornstalks before 1949. The local government built a theater in the west of the square in the early days of the People's Republic of China when collectivization was launched, so that locals might gather for various meetings. Also, the local government set up its offices in the Zhous' Residence at the northwestern corner of the square. Thus, the square took a more important position in the town and its political significance grew stronger accordingly.

The reform of the political structure was started in the Yanhu Town in May 1984 and the local government moved out of the Zhous' Residence. The square began to lose its political significance as well. As rural bazaars flourished in the country and the local aquaculture kept developing in the Yanhu Town, the square turned into a venue for economic activities.

The square couldn't accommodate the rapidly-expanding bazaar any more in the middle and late 1990s and the bazaar was gradually moved to the central street in the town. The square bazaar declined. Later, the theater was shut down and new public spaces, such as television and Internet, emerged and replaced the square. The square declined rapidly. The town's government made an overall reconstruction and renovation planning around 2009 for the public spaces in the town, the square included. However, the planning was never well materialized, as too many interest parties got involved.

The state power and the economic capital have always dominated the production and development of public spaces, as was shown in the history of a town's public square. This principle is also applicable to today's urban planning. However, many researchers of urban planning focus more on the complicated relationships and games between various powers, particularly the resistance of non-governmental forces against the political power, in urban planning and space production. In actuality, three powers get involved in the space production concerning urban planning, namely the government, developers and the public. The three parties have various conflicts and confrontations, as their demands for public spaces differ. The government pursues political gains, developers economic profits and the public more leisure space, better life and a sense of satisfaction.²⁷²

Xu Jiangang and others make a critical analysis of the extension project of the western part of Hankou Road in Nanjing in *Urban Transportation Engineering and Spatial and Social Relations*. In their analysis, we see how the state politics and the capital dominate the public space production and how the public, as a third party in the urban space planning, resist the government-dominated urban planning and space production. The government finds it an effective way of relieving the traffic pressure and congestion to extend Hankou Road westwards. However, the authors see little effects of the project; to the contrary, they think that the project results in quite a number of consequences, economically, socially and environmentally. The removal and construction costs of the project are huge. In addition, the project may

²⁷²“The Cultural Expression in the Space Design of a Theme Park in the Vision of Consumerism”, *Jiangxi Social Sciences*, 2012 (9).

lead to social inequality. The tunnel in the project is largely built with automobile driveways and only few people or only government officials would be benefited. Also, widened automobile lanes must occupy bicycle lanes and side pavements. The interest of cyclists and pedestrians is thus harmed. Moreover, the eastern end of the project is already plagued with air pollution. When automobiles queue up at the portal, the tail gas density is 10-plus times that in a normal road section. With the project completed, the new crossing will be another worst-hit area of traffic accidents and pollution.

The authors attach even more significance to the project's cultural implications, in addition to the aforementioned economic, social and environmental ones. The extended part of the road would go through the historical and cultural area covering four universities, Nanjing University included, and surrounding communities. The project would produce immeasurable negative impacts on this area and the city's sustainable development.

The authors illustrate the century-old historical and cultural area covering Southeast University, Hohai University, Nanjing University and Nanjing Normal University. The area is like a signature of Nanjing and the key cultural resources of the city. Therefore, the east-west area should be well preserved in the urban planning and remain as the city's cultural and spiritual center and icon. It shouldn't be cut into pieces. The project of extending Hankou Road westwards wouldn't relieve the traffic congestion. Furthermore, it would leave negative economic, social, environmental and cultural impacts and generate huge costs. And its negative implications on the city's sustainable development would be hardly removed.

Zhou Jiwu echoes Xu Jiangang by writing "A Reflection on the Urban Planning" and highlights the dominant role the state power and capital play in space production. According to Zhou, the development of urban space is "a power- and capital-dominated economic development pattern", which produces both innovative fruits and negative impacts. Due to those negative impacts, the economic and social goals promised by the urban planning may fail, while the people would feel unsatisfied, worried and afraid. However, the interest parties concern about their benefits in spatial development and are afraid that they would lose the space-related memories and status symbol in the ever-accelerating space production. Thus, the capital- and power-dominated and spatial profit-oriented economic development pattern is more questioned by "folk communities" day by day.

(III) The Public Space and the Public Sphere

Public spaces are usually related to Habermas's public sphere that is a political-cultural concept referring to public spaces both as physical carriers and virtual spaces like the Internet. A physical public space may be the political or cultural public sphere where people hold meetings, speeches and political discussions to express their political opinions. Such a place is known as the political public space. Or, the public sphere is a physical space for leisure and open to all the people. One finds both types in modern China, particularly the latter type. Shi

Mingzheng, Li Deying and Xiong Yuezhi examine the political activities held in the parks in Beijing and Chengdu and in Zhang's Garden in the late Qing Dynasty.²⁷³

There had been no public spaces where the people could have open discussions of political issues in China before the early 20th century. Politicians back then usually held secret meetings in their own houses or in quite few public places (such as restaurants and brothels as the best choices). The situation changed with parks. Social organizations and political forces preferred to hold meetings, propaganda activities and public mobilization campaigns in parks where the atmosphere was comparatively carefree and more people were attracted. For example, during the Railway Protection Movement in May 1911, the citizens of Chengdu gathered in Shaocheng Park, to resist the nationalization of the railway and safeguard China's sovereignty over its own railways. This movement was the herald of the Revolution of 1911. The Chinese Beiyang Government yielded to Japan and signed the unequal *Twenty-one Demands* with Japan in 1915. More than 300,000 people in Beijing went to the Central Park to protest.

According to Xiong Yuezhi, Zhang's Garden was an important public space in Shanghai in the late Qing Dynasty and served as the venue for various gatherings and speeches open to the public. The notice to such an activity was usually put up beforehand, to invite more people to attend. Zhang's Garden was a tourist attraction at the time. A gathering held there would thus always be a hot topic.

Xiong Yuezhi points out, however, that a public space like Zhang's Garden was never something native or natural to the Chinese society. It neither grew out of a traditional Chinese garden or theater or teahouse, nor was introduced from the West. A public space like Zhang's Garden took shape for various reasons. First of all, Chinese intellectuals traditionally were eager to get involved in politics and took the world as their duty. They held discussions in teahouses and brothels. Secondly, Western thoughts and practices, such as freedom of speech, gatherings and speeches and circular telegrams, would later turn into street politics. Concessions in Shanghai played a special role here. A concession on China's land enjoyed quite a number of extraterritorial rights and was like a crack leaving profound impacts on the unified country. Concessions became a weak point in the governance of the Qing court and the anti-government forces accumulated their power in this political space.

Thus, those at the bottom of society in China had no say to a public space. It was the state power that gave, willingly or being forced, a public space to the people. According to some scholars, two issues must receive enough attention when modern city parks as a new public space are talked about under the public sphere

²⁷³See Shi Mingzheng, "From the Imperial Gardens to Parks: Changes in the Urban Space in Beijing in the Early 20th Century", *Urban History Research*, 2005 (23); Li Deying, "Social Conflicts in a Park: A Case Study of City Parks in Modern Chengdu", *Historical Review*, 2003 (1); Li Deying, "Public Urban Space and Social Life: A Case Study of City Parks in Modern China", *Urban History Research* (Vols. 19–20), Tianjin: Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2000; Xiong Yuezhi, "Opening of Private Gardens in Shanghai and the Expanding Public Space in the Late Qing Dynasty", *Academic Monthly*, 1998 (8); and Xiong Yuezhi, "Zhang's Garden: A Case Study of the Public Space in Shanghai in the Late Qing Dynasty", *Archives and History*, 1996 (6).

theory: First, whether a city park is a public sphere in Habermas's theory depends upon if the park serves as a venue where the public express their opinions and talk about public affairs. Not all the political activities conducted in a city park represent the expression of the public opinions. The discussions held in a city park about an organization's internal affairs are not the public opinions, either. More in-depth studies are needed. Secondly, the criteria mentioned above for a city park are applicable to the public urban spaces in the entire city; that is, whether the public urban spaces are truly for the public to express their opinions depends upon the specific historical context, instead of the spaces themselves. Therefore, city parks and even public urban spaces in modern China should be examined in specific contexts, with the complicated background of the public space production in China taken into consideration.²⁷⁴

As was shown in this section, public spaces in modern China have been usually in cracks, be it a crack in the center of the national political power or a crack between the state and capital. It's been evident in the history of public spaces in modern China.

Citizens enjoy their leisure time in a public space. A field survey conducted on Taihu Square shows that citizens largely take a walk, accompany their children and enjoy the cool on the square.²⁷⁵ Thus, public spaces in China are mostly "something physical"²⁷⁶ closely related to people's everyday life, like the situations in public spaces in Beijing, Chengdu and Zhang's Garden mentioned above. The recreational and leisure activities may form distinct cultural patterns (e.g. tea-houses), thanks to people's contacts and dialogs. Nevertheless, such activities play a role in promoting communication between people.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴Dai Yifeng, "Diversified Perspectives and Different Interpretations: the Public Urban Space around City Parks in Modern China", *Social Sciences*, 2011 (6).

²⁷⁵Tian Zhunjun et al., "A Study of Leisure Behaviors of People on a City Square: A Case Study of Taihu Square in Wuxi", *Human Geography*, 2009 (3).

²⁷⁶Dai Yifeng, "Diversified Perspectives and Different Interpretations: the Public Urban Space around City Parks in Modern China", *Social Sciences*, 2011 (6).

²⁷⁷Wu Congping, "The Changing Public Space and Everyday Urban Life: A Case Study of Teahouse in Modern Nanjing", *Journal of University of Science and Technology Beijing*, 2009 (3); Liu Shilin, "Citizen Squares and the Cultural Production in Urban Space", *Gansu Social Sciences*, 2008 (3); Hu Junxiu & Li Yongjun, "Public Urban Space and Civil Life in Modern China: A Case Study of Sun Yat-sen Park in Hankou (1929–1949)", *Gansu Social Sciences*, 2009 (1).

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